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UNH Instructor Publishes Book on Teens Who Can't Read

Featured speaker at Learning Through Teaching conference March 16

By [Erika Mantz](#)

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UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Pam Mueller, an education instructor at the University of New Hampshire, will discuss her new book, "Lifers: Learning From At-Risk Adolescent Readers," at a one-day conference March 16 on the UNH campus.

Mueller's book is a culmination of more than 20 years working with at-risk high school students who are reading well below level as well as dissertation work on the topic. Her research involved interviewing 22 ninth graders three times over a semester about their reading history in the hopes of supporting her suspicion that kids have always struggled with reading, but nothing the schools did was working.

"The things I discovered were astonishing," says Mueller, who is also a facilitator for New Hampshire's Best Schools Initiative and an instructor in UNH's Learning Through Teaching program. "These students were receiving attention in school, most of them came from homes where they had been read to, and most had been excited about learning. But by the time they reached middle school, reading had lost its meaning and people simply closed their eyes to the fact that more than 20 percent of them couldn't read."

Mueller isn't willing to accept this. In the book she describes the three workshops she and her colleagues developed to help adolescents learn to read.

"Kids become better readers by reading," she says. "We allow them to choose books they want to read and give

them the time to read. I believe that all kids can become readers."

Mueller is also concerned that many kids who simply don't know how to read are being coded as learning disabled.

"In my experience, just a handful of these kids are truly learning disabled," she says, while acknowledging that teachers need to develop new skills to deal with adolescents who can't read. "Right now I'm working with three schools to help teachers rethink their view of reading instruction. Change is always hard."

Learning Through Teaching is an in-service program designed to help teachers of grades K-12 meet their individual goals in teaching reading, writing and literature. It is unique because it brings teacher education to the site of instruction -- the teacher's school and classroom. The program is offered by the NH Literacy Institutes, UNH Dept. of English and UNH Continuing Education. For more information, visit <http://www.learn.unh.edu/lt/>.

For more information on the Learning Through Teaching conference, call 862-1168 or e-mail nh.literacy.unh.edu.

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