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Imagine having important ideas to communicate, but not possessing the ability to express them verbally. Imagine the frustration of trying to read, but the letters appear jumbled and you cannot discern their meaning. Imagine listening attentively to instructions, but hearing only a string of disjointed sounds that are incoherent.

What we can only imagine is the daily reality for nearly four million school-age children in America with learning disabilities. Often affecting an individual's ability to interpret what they see or hear, a learning disability can severely limit one's performance in the classroom and impede learning.

While obtaining an accurate and timely diagnosis of a disability is essential, even more critical is developing the right plan and finding the right teaching methods to best meet the student’s needs. It is the special education teacher who often takes the lead in this process. We depend on them to chart and pilot our child’s educational course. They are vital resources for both child and family.

We rely on the special education teacher to evaluate the child's progress, assess his strengths and weaknesses, devise an individualized plan of instruction, try non-standard teaching methods and help each student achieve the highest skill-level possible. Without the help of this specially trained professional, a child's situation could spiral out of control, only widening the gap between age-appropriate skills and those of the LD student.

The rapidly expanding College of Education at USF St. Petersburg offers the student majoring in Special Education innovative and cutting-edge instruction designed to prepare them to be tomorrow’s teachers. USF St. Petersburg is fast becoming one of the nation's best universities, and its College of Education is where leading scholars in the field are teaching the teachers.

One such scholar is Mark A. Koorland who is joining the USF St. Petersburg faculty as a professor of special education.

Koorland attended the University of Florida where he earned his degrees in special education. His bachelor's degree specialized in mental retardation, his master's in emotional disturbances, and his doctorate in learning disabilities with a minor in applied behavior-analysis. He later attended the University of Kentucky for a post-doctoral fellowship in special education microcomputer technology.

He comes to USF St. Petersburg from the University of Florida where he was chair of the Special Education Department. He also taught at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, Florida International University in Miami, Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, and the University of South Alabama in Mobile. Before accepting his first professorship, he was a crisis intervention teacher in Gainesville, a consulting teacher in Ocala, and he taught at a middle school level program for the educable mentally retarded in Reddick, Florida.

A prolific writer, Koorland has authored articles and book chapters on topics such as assessment of special education texts, teaching sight words to children with learning disabilities, story mapping for children with behavioral disorders, teaching students with severe multiple disorders, and telecoaching.

An often-invited guest speaker and presenter at national and international conferences, Koorland has made presentations in Egypt, Brazil, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, and throughout the United States.

"Dr Koorland will make an excellent addition to our faculty," said Gary Olson, interim associate vice president for Academic Affairs. "He is a respected scholar and is admired by both his students and peers."

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