



Steven Forness

by Sarah Marker

Dr. Steven Forness is an international leader in the field of emotional disorders in children. He has dedicated his life to

improving “early detection and eligibility of children with psychiatric disorders for special

education services in public schools” (TECBD, 2007). The following information comes from Marquis, 2008 unless specified otherwise. Dr. Forness is well known for his leadership throughout the Los Angeles, California in various positions of psychiatry. He has earned many awards and was honored with the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences from [UCLA](#).

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Background Information

Steven Forness was born in Denver on May 13, 1939 to Robert E. and Rejeana C. (Houck) Forness. He attended Catholic schooling and was raised Irish Catholic. He has a brother who is four years younger. He received in BA in English Education from the University of Northern Colorado in 1963 after attending the U.S. Naval Academy. He earned his MA in Educational/School Psychology in 1964. He then went on to receive in Ed.D. in Special Education from [UCLA](#) in 1968. Dr. Forness served in the military from 1957 to 1959 as a specialist 4/C in the U.S. Army Security.

The Road to the Future

Although Dr. Forness now resides in California, he still considers Denver to be his home. At the time that Dr. Forness was graduating high school, the draft was implemented. In order to preempt being drafted, Dr. Forness enlisted in the army. The day after graduation, he went to basic training and then went into Army security. He learned Arabic and was due to go to Cairo, Egypt as an Arabic linguist but saw a notice on a bulletin board for [West Point Prep School](#) in Virginia. Dr. Forness was granted the appointment at [West Point](#). He later went on to the [Naval Academy](#) for less than a year. He found that this path did not fit his lifestyle and went back to Colorado. He was accepted to the Colorado State Teachers College, now commonly known as the University of Northern Colorado. His undergraduate specialization was in English and Education. He enjoyed the small school atmosphere and played on the tennis team. He wanted to continue his education at UNC through its English Master program. To apply, the university has tables set up in the gymnasium for students to sign up. Unfortunately, an advisor that Dr. Forness had a great relationship with left the university and Dr. Forness was apprehensive about pursuing this degree. The table next to the English table was the Educational Psychology. This topic had interested Dr. Forness, so he signed up. He earned his Master's degree in one year.

Improving the Lives of Children

Dr. Forness began his chosen career at Santa Maria High School in California from 1964 to 1966. During this time, Dr. Forness was fulfilling the requirement of having two years of teaching experience to become a school psychologist. While teaching, he taught a sophomore that he found was unable

to read. Dr. Forness referred him to the school psychologist and had the child tested. The evaluation determined that the child did not have any academic problems, rather the child was dyslexic. This left Dr. Forness continually pondering "what should be done with this student? ". He decided to enroll in school psychology and an introductory course to special education at the end of the school year at UCLA. He made such an impression in these courses that a professor at UCLA held a doctoral position for him, which allowed him to fulfill his teaching requirement/contract. Dr. Forness completed his dissertation, entitled "Lateral Dominance in Retarded Readers with Signs of Brain Dysfunction" in one year as a result of the university changing from a semester system to quarters. At this time, Barbara Keough and Frank Hewitt were creating the child division at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute (NPI). From 1966 to 1968, he was a special education counselor at UCLA. He and an inpatient teacher started the inpatient school psychology program. He also created an outpatient school psychology assessment service at NPI. He then went on to be the Special Educator at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute (1968-2003). This position allowed Dr. Forness to be the school principal at the onground school for children in treatment for their mental health needs. He supervised school psychologists who completed assessments as well as students completing their residencies. The school program was revamped the structure of the inpatient school program. Dr. Forness is a Senior Fulbright Scholar through the Ministry of Education, Portugal in 1976. He was also the Chief of the Educational Psychology Child Outpatient Department (1970-2003), member of the Mental Retardation Research Center (1970-2003), Professor of Psychiatry (1972-2003), Principal Inpatient Sch. (1976-2003), and Director of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities training program (1985-1992). Dr. Forness has had a research based career and excelled in his opportunities to put theory into action.

(S. Forness, personal communication, November 7, 2009).

One of Dr. Forness' major accomplishments was the co-authoring of the Handbook of Learning Disabilities, Volumes I, II, and III with Kenneth Kavale and Michael Bender. This book was a remarkable breakthrough in mass understanding of the diagnosis and treatment of learning disabilities. Dr. Forness and Kavale produced Science of Learning Disabilities (1985) and Nature of Learning Disabilities (1995) together. Kavale and Forness both taught at the University of California. A more detailed (but not exhaustive) list is included at the end of this entry. He has contributed to hundreds of journals through his writings and editorships. His editorships will be discussed further in this article. Dr. Forness has written with Beth A Benjamin, Regina Bussing, Dennis P. Cantwell, Pablo Davanzo, F.M. Gresham, Gregory L. Hanna, Bryan H. King, J. Knitzer, D.L. MacMillan, James T. McCracken, Lenn Murrelle, and Bonnie T. Zima.

Beyond the Classroom

Dr. Forness has applied his knowledge and skills to improving the community through diverse means. He was on the grant review panel for the Special Education section of the U.S. Department of Education. In this position, he helped to decide funding for projects throughout the United States. He worked with a variety of legal teams to help shape the laws and the way that they are enforced for youth with special needs. The San Francisco Youth Law Center, Western Law Center for the Handicapped, Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. all benefited from his expertise.

Dr. Forness has worked with agencies from sea to sea and beyond. He has been an advisor to schools and agencies California, Navajo Indian Reservation in

Arizona, Denver, Florida, Maryland, Kentucky, Australia, Virginia, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, and the Netherlands.

Governmental Work

As previously stated, while in the U.S. Naval Academy, Dr. Forness served as a Specialist 4/C. He was able to reconnect with a different form of governmental service by speaking to lawmakers in regards to the education of special needs students. He has spoken to the United States House of Representatives in regards to the definition and identification of children with serious emotional disturbances in the schools and to the U.S. Senate on school programs for children with serious emotional disturbance. His definition helped forge the definition from serious emotional disturbance to emotional disturbance. This change meant that services would be available to more students. He was also asked to speak to the California State Senate Hearings on developmental disabilities. He was a member of the Scientific Advisory Panel for the National Study on Transition of Head Start Children, which was commissioned by the U.S. Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. He was an associate on the Advisory Committee on Exceptional Children, Office of Overseas Schools for the U.S. Department of State.

Awards and Recognitions

Dr. Forness has been acknowledged for his accomplishments from an array of sources. He has received the [Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Northern Colorado in 2006](#) and Distinguished Professor Emeritus from UCLA. The latter is an honor received after Dr. Forness' retirement in 2003.

This honor was given for his distinguished service to the university and the field for his work in teaching, research, and scholarship. He is a fellow at the [International Academy of Research in Learning Disabilities](#) and [American Association of Mental Retardation](#). He is a member of [Teacher Educators for Children with Behavior Disorders](#) and was President from 1985-1986. He also received the Leadership Award from [TECBD](#) in 1995. The Forness Regional Scholarship from [TECBD](#) was created in 2003. Forness was an Interdisciplinary Council Member for the [American Association of University Affiliated Programs in Developmental Disabilities](#) from 1972-1989. He has worked extensively with the [International Council for Exceptional Children](#). He was a Delegate of the Assembly from 1988 to 1991, J.E. Wallace Wallin recipient in 1992, the Excellence in Teacher Education recipient in 1995 and on the Honors Committee from 1999 to 2002. The Wallin award is considered by Dr. Forness to be the award he is most proud of. It is given as an all-around award, encompassing his career contributions to the field. He was in the Order of St. John to Jerusalem, [Knights of Malta](#) in 1994. He was named the Teacher Educator of the Year by the Teacher Education Division of CEC and Merrill Press in 1995. Dr. Forness was an Executive Committee Member for the Academy on Mental Retardation from 1989 to 1991 and Co-Chair of Definition Task Force for the National Mental Health and Special Education Coalition, 1987-2000. He was on the DSM IV subcommittee on learning disorders with the [American Psychiatric Association](#) from 1988-1994 and was given the Best Article of the Year Award from the [APA](#). At the [Midwest Symposium on Behavioral Disorders](#) in 1993, Dr. Forness was given the Leadership Award. He was given the Sidney Berman award on Learning Disorders from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 2000.

He was also on the research panel at the [Institute for Developmental](#)

[Research at San Diego Center for Children](#) in 2005. He was the Co-Chairman of Practice Parameters on Learning Disabilities committee for [the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#) from 1996 to 1998 and on the Committee of Professional Advisors for the Professional Group for Attention and Related Disorders from 1990 to 1991.

Editorships

Dr. Forness has been an editor for journals that are cutting edge and furthering goals that he shares with the publications. These include the [Journal of Learning Disabilities](#), [Journal of School Psychology](#), Learning Disability Quarterly, Remedial and Special Education, American Journal of Mental Retardation, Behavioral Disorders, Monographs in Behavioral Disorders, Education and Treatment of Children, Learning Disability Research and Practice, Teacher Education and Special Education, Exceptionality, Academy on Mental Retardation Newsletter, Journal of Child and Family Studies, and Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Youth.

Publications

[Education of Exceptional Learners](#) (with Frank Hewett), Third Edition, 1984.

[Science of Learning Disabilities](#) (with K. Kavale) 1985

[Nature of Learning Disabilities](#) (with K. Kavale), 1995

[Efficacy of Special Education](#), 1999

[Handbook on the Assessment of Learning Disabilities: Theory, Research, and Practice](#)

(with H. Lee Swanson), 1991

Learning Disabilities and Related Disorders (with E. Sinclair), 2002 (Marquis, 2008).

Technological applications by Thomas E. Scruggs, Margo A. Mastropieri
Research and global perspectives in learning disabilities: essays in honor of William M. Cruickshank, by Daniel P. Hallahan, Barbara K. Keogh, William M. Cruickshank

Social Skills in Pictures, Stories, and Songs - A Multisensory Program for Preschool and Early Elementary Students, by Dr. Loretta A. Serna, Dr. M. Elizabeth Nielsen, and Dr. Steven R. Forness.

Self Reflection

The following information is from a personal communication with Dr. Forness on November 7, 2009. Dr. Forness takes great pride in the programs he was able to create, all of which ultimately benefited children and others who access NPI. He created an interdisciplinary program in which pediatrician, social workers, nursing trainees, special education department, dentistry and doctoral students. Each discipline would take a class and teach. This group would also staff a student at NPI to gain the interdisciplinary perspective.

He believes that his most important achievement is impact he has made in the field of eligibility of children with psychological problems for special education instruction. There is a high co morbidity with mental health and special education. He believes his legacy lies in the work he did with the U.S. government in changing the definition of emotional disturbance. He credits much of his success to the network of people who surrounded him. He met Frank Hewett and Barbara Keough through UCLA. He met Ken Kavale through Hewett. He and Kavale published about 100 things together. Denny Cantwell

was a training director in child psychology and did research in co morbidity. Jim Simmons was in the university's psychology department. Simmons was a general in the army national guard and an academic leader. He carried the military mind into the educational field. He led with the motto of having to take care of the men/troops first. Dr. Forness modeled his supervisory style after Simmons. He would walk around to everyone so that he would have a grasp on what the "front lines" did everyday.

Summary

Dr. Forness has found great pleasure in learning and carried this belief on through his work with children with mental health disorders. He feels that he was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. He came into the field as the focus on special education and child mental health was gaining attention. "Child psychology has transformed over the last forty years and I had a ringside seat for it" (S. Forness, personal communication, November 7, 2009). As a young man, he never thought he would have led the life he did. He almost did not take the position at NPI. He just happened to be in Frank Hewett's office on the day that they were looking to fill the position. In 1991, Dr. Forness' encountered a health problem that made him reconsider the amount of work he was taking on. Budget cuts were causing staff reduction, although many of his staff either retired or went on to private practice or left on their own to other positions. Dr. Forness retired in 2003 and is "trying not to do anything." Despite this thought, he is involved in six research projects ranging from a secondary prevention program in Oregon, emotional disturbance in the classroom in Boston to mentoring at UCLA. He also gives lectures throughout the United States. He continues to have a great passion in talking about ideas to help benefit children

with emotional disorders. He is truly enthusiastic about individuals with whom he has collaborated. Dr. Forness' work has helped sculpt the way that educational services are administered throughout the world.

See also:

Learning disabilities: contemporary viewpoints by Bryant J. Cratty, Richard L. Goldman

Mental Health, Children, University of California, UCLA, Emotional Disturbance

<http://www.zoominfo.com/Search/PersonDetail.aspx?PersonID=5527211> links to some of Dr. Forness' writings

http://www.unco.edu/cebs/pdfs/newsletter_summer06.pdf Newsletter from the University of Northern Colorado regarding his Alumni Award

key terms: depression, psychopharmacology, early intervention, mental retardation, behavior disorders, learning disorders, conduct disorder, mental disorder, attention deficit, disruptive behavior disorders, special education, depression, psychopharmacology, early intervention and mental retardation, and as an advocate for children and adolescents with emotional or behavioral disorders

References

Biomedexperts (2009). *Steve forness*. Retrieved from

http://www.biomedexperts.com/Profile.bme/411877/Steve_Forness

Marquis, (2008). *Who's who in America 2009*.

<http://tecbd.asu.edu/2007/conference07.html#Forness>

www.centerforchildren.org