

Ph.D. in Literacy Studies, Middle Tennessee State University

# Newsletter

## Special Issue: A Year in Review

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**By Dr. Jwa Kim, Interim Director**

Looking back on this past year, I should confess that this was a year of great success for the Literacy Studies Ph.D. program at MTSU. First, the program hired a new faculty member, Dr. Amy Elleman. Dr. Elleman received her Ph.D. degree from Vanderbilt in 2009 and had been a research coordinator for two years at Vanderbilt before she joined the Literacy Studies program faculty at MTSU this past summer. I expect great things from her. Second, the program has grown dramatically from 13 students in 2010 to 22 students in 2011. Considering that faculty and students are the two key components in the program, we witnessed a tremendous success in the program. We are also fortunate to have amazing Angela who takes cares of us and runs the

program smoothly. We are truly blessed to have her in the program.

Many students made good progress in their academic journey. Danielle Thompson graduated as the first Ph.D. from the program last summer. Stacey Miller, Melissa Brock, and Erica Powell successfully passed the preliminary exam and formed their dissertation committees. Erica Powell, Rachel Anderberg and Missie Sugart completed their practicum. Numerous students made presentations and even received monetary awards from various professional organizations. Congratulations to all of you on your great work!

I had a chance to attend the International Dyslexia Association conference last November in Chicago. It was an eye-opening experience for me. I gained confidence that our faculty and students will do as well as or better than the majority of the presenters at the conference. Your training from this program will make you a competent researcher in the field of literacy. My recent trip to China gave me a broader perspective for our program. I

hope we recruit more international students.

I would like to take this moment to encourage all of you to engage in research activities with faculty members and/or peers. Each faculty member is running his or her own research team. If you haven't done so, please check with each faculty member to see if you can join his or her research team. Collaboration with faculty and peers will give you invaluable research experience in literacy. Only through scientific research can we build the body of knowledge in the area and apply our knowledge to practice in order to resolve issues in literacy.

Oh, we are not just a bunch of nerds who only study and conduct research! The program picnic in last October was an entertaining social gathering. Who knows, next year we may have something more exciting! I learned, too, this past year that you are all caring people. Thanks for visiting Casey while she was in the hospital with her twin girls. Casey is ready to come back to work. Thanks! Davonna had a new baby named Cameron. He is

## End-of-Year Thoughts (continued)

such a joy, and I'm happy to see him whenever Davonna brings him along during meetings or visits to my office. Thanks Davonna for sharing Cameron with us. This past year, Rachel Peay got married, and I had the privilege to look at her beautiful wedding pictures. Thanks

for sharing the pictures with us.

I expect next year to be a greater and even better year for our program. Again, I want to reassure all of you that my first priority is the success of our faculty and students in their academic

and personal lives. I will do my best to make it happen. Thank you for your passion for literacy and your hard work to achieve your career goals.

With much hope and gratitude,  
Jwa K. Kim, Interim Director

## New Faculty Profile: Amy Elleman



In 2011, the program welcomed a new faculty member, Dr. Amy Elleman.

I began my undergraduate studies at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, OH near my hometown of Castalia. There I met my husband, an army officer, and followed him to Germany. While in Germany, I finished my undergraduate degree in psychology at the University of Maryland University College while working as an instructional aide in inclusion classes at Ramstein Elementary School, a Department of Defense school. There I had the opportunity to learn from several outstanding teachers for over two years. This experience sparked an interest to further explore how psychological principles could be practically applied in classroom settings. After returning to the U.S., I worked as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade resource teacher in a middle school in North Carolina. We then moved to Tennessee where I worked as a middle school teacher at Wallace Academy, a self-contained school for students identified with an emotional behavior disability

and had been expelled from their public school setting. Working with students in this setting was invaluable. I gained hands-on experience in how to apply psychological theory to teaching and behavior management. I learned about the power of listening to students, the benefits of providing authentic learning experiences, and the importance of good classroom management. While at Wallace Academy, I worked as a teacher, reading specialist, and during the last two years, an assistant principal. One of the interesting things I noticed while working with the students was that even though they were diagnosed with a behavior disorder, not a learning disorder, almost all of them struggled with reading. Knowing I had a lot more to learn about helping these students, I decided to enroll for a Master's degree at Vanderbilt University. After finishing my degree in special education, I spent two years as a project coordinator for a federally funded grant learning the nuts and bolts of running a reading intervention project. This experience led me to my doctoral studies at Vanderbilt. During my program, I became interested in the relationship between vocabulary instruction and comprehension, so I conducted a meta-analysis to consider the impact of vocabulary instruction on students' comprehension of text. I was also interested in comprehension instruction, especially inference generation, and comprehension assessment. This led to my dissertation work in which I designed and implemented a dynamic assessment of infer-

ential comprehension to assist in the early identification of students at risk for developing a reading disability due to poor comprehension. After completion of my degree, I worked two years as a research associate on a federally funded grant for improving reading outcomes for first grade students at risk for developing a reading disability. Since beginning at MTSU, I have been working with a team of students including Sue Amundrud, Candice Nolan, Penny Thompson, Michelle Hasty, Holly Marshall, Jennifer Cooper, and Casey Brasher to develop a comprehension intervention focused on inference instruction to improve the general comprehension of students, as well as to consider the impact of inference instruction on skilled and less skilled readers' literal and inferential understanding of text. In addition to the intervention study, I am working on a meta-analysis of over 200 comprehension studies. For this study we are examining the effectiveness of particular types of instruction, using a broader sample of reports and time span than that used by the National Reading Panel. We are also considering specific learner characteristics, contextual aspects of instruction, and measurement characteristics associated with effects in comprehension. Consideration of these features will hopefully provide insight into which factors have the greatest impact on comprehension instruction as well as inform researchers of the specific methodological factors that should be considered when implementing comprehension interventions and interpreting their effects.

# 2011 in Pictures

## Fall Picnic



## Trip to China



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### 2011 Program News

The program faculty would like to acknowledge students who reached significant academic milestones in 2011:

- ◆ Danielle Thompson earned the program's first Ph.D. degree.
- ◆ Stacey Miller, Melissa Brock, and Erica Powell passed the preliminary examination and are now in the dissertation phase of the program.
- ◆ Erica Powell, Rachel Anderberg, and Missie Stugart completed the program's 60-hour practicum at Mt. Juliet Elementary (Mt. Juliet, TN), Creekside Park Elementary (Anchorage, Alaska), and Stratford High School (Nashville, TN) respectively.

We thank the following individuals for providing practicum supervision in 2011:

- ◆ Ms. Gayle Hooper, Extended School Program Director, Mt. Juliet Elementary
- ◆ Ms. Theresa Owens, Principal, Creekside Park Elementary
- ◆ Mr. Michael Steele, Executive Principal, Stratford High School

## Announcements

### SUMMER 2012 COURSES

**PSY 7280/7281 PSYCH STATISTICS: REGRESSION** (Kim, June 4 – Aug. 10 - MW 4:40 – 7:10 p.m. F (lab) 4:50 – 6 p.m.)

**LITS 7021 COGNITIVE NEUROPSYCHOLOGY OF LANG AND LITERACY** (Magne, June 4-29, M-R 12:50 – 3:15 p.m.)

### LITS 7330 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERACY STUDIES

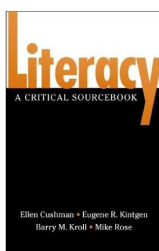
- Young Urban Children's Talk and Participation in Literacy: Discourse Analysis (3 credits) (Fain, May 14 – June 2)
- Literacy Intervention Research (3 credits) (Elleman, June 4-29, M-F 9-12)
- Modeling and Assessing Vocabulary Knowledge (3 credits) (Blackwell, June 4 – August 10, Independent Study)
- EEG Methodology in Language Processing Research (3 credits) (Magne, June 4 – August 10, Independent Study)
- Topic TBD (3 credits) (Kim, June 4 – August 10, Independent Study)

### CALL FOR PAPERS

The 63rd Annual International Dyslexia Association Conference on Reading, Literacy & Learning at the Baltimore Convention Center on October 24-27, 2012, is accepting proposals through January 18, 2012 (<http://www.interdys.org/CallForPapers.htm>).

### SPRING COLLOQUIA

- Dr. Aimee Holt, February 15, 2012, 7 p.m.
- Dr. Laurie Cutting (tentative), March 21, 2012, 7 p.m.
- Melissa Brock, April 18, 2012, 7 p.m.



### NEW PUBLICATION OF INTEREST

This new collection of both landmark and current essays provides a comprehensive overview of the major themes and questions that shape literacy studies today. *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook* is an indispensable reference tool for anyone interested in the field of literacy studies and ideally suited for use in a wide range of upper-division and graduate classes (from the back cover).