1993-2018

Still Meeting the Challenge of Dyslexia and Reading Underachievement

Much has changed since the establishment of the Center for Dyslexia in 1993. Technology now inhabits every aspect of our lives, and the types of skills required to be competitive in today's economy have changed. As a result, literacy is the most fundamental life skill that a child must achieve to be a citizen of the 21st century.

In 1992, only 27 percent of the children in Tennessee were proficient readers. Today that number is 41 percent. While this trend is in the right direction, the majority of the children in our state are not proficient readers, and we are obligated to ensure that they receive the educational experiences needed to achieve literacy. As we commit ourselves to this obligation, we must always remember that, just as in 1993, some children across the state struggle to read in spite of applying themselves and being given the best classroom instruction educators can provide. The heartbreaking reality is that these children underachieve due to no fault of their own. This is the reality of dyslexia.

It is within this context that the center still remains committed to its founding principles as exemplified by its three pillars of excellence: Research, Educator Training, and Community Service and Outreach. And, it is on these pillars that we continue to build our efforts to ensure that every child in the state is provided with empirically validated instruction to develop the skills needed to become literate citizens of the 21st century.
The Research Laboratory at the center is actively engaged in several exciting projects led by our Chair of Excellence, Tim Odegard, and our new assistant director of educational services and research initiatives, Emily Farris. Several of these projects strive to inform efforts to identify and intervene with children who are at-risk for or who are experiencing reading underachievement.

For example, we are exploring how children’s persistence in the face of adversity and attention to written language impacts their reading abilities. These efforts build on a theoretical model that describes how cognitive and language abilities, as well as social and emotional skills, may serve as protective factors in students to minimize the negative impacts associated with reading disability on their learning outcomes.

A generous gift from the International Dyslexia Association is supporting an investigation into the impact of simultaneous multi-sensory instructional techniques within direct instruction of reading on student progress. An advisory committee composed of leading experts in reading intervention from across the country continues to guide this effort, and we expect to start data collection in late spring. We will directly compare the use of different versions of instructional techniques across groups of children receiving reading intervention.

We are especially excited to be using our new 64 channel EEG suite to allow us to look at more refined differences in the activation and coordination of distributed brain regions supporting the development of children’s reading skills.

Center research was showcased in one of the research colloquia chaired by Odegard at the 2018 annual conference of the International Dyslexia Association held in Manshantucket, Connecticut, in October.

We invite you to visit the research section of our website, mtsu.edu/dyslexia, to learn more about our research activities.

Emily Farris has joined the staff as assistant director of educational services and research initiatives. She completed her Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology at the University of Texas–Arlington and her postdoctoral fellowship in psychiatry and neuroscience at the University of California–San Francisco under the mentorship of Dr. Fumiko Hoeft.

Tim Odegard serves as the associate editor of Annals of Dyslexia and on the editorial board of Perspectives on Language and Literacy. These official publications of the International Dyslexia Association feature peer-reviewed research, as well as practical articles for educators, respectively.
Recent Findings

Dyslexia Legislation and the Identification of Dyslexia

There has been a proliferation of state laws intended to guide efforts to identify and intervene on behalf of children who struggle to read due to dyslexia. Many have cheered the passage of these laws, while others have objected, arguing that these laws result in the gross overidentification of dyslexia. Proponents and detractors alike rarely provide actual data to support their arguments. Anne Phillips, a Ph.D. student in MTSU’s Literacy Studies program, collaborated with Tim Odegard to address the need for data to inform the public discourse surrounding dyslexia and reading underachievement. Their research on the impact of dyslexia legislation across the country on the identification rates of specific learning disability in states after they implemented a dyslexia law. However, the research shows that identification rates have not spiked in states with dyslexia laws. In addition, Phillips and Odegard also analyzed data from two states that mandate public schools to report their identification rates of dyslexia. Schools in both states identified dyslexia at rates that were below the most conservative estimate of dyslexia, which is 5% of the school-aged population. Identification rates became even lower when looking at middle and high school students. The majority of schools do not identify even a single child as having dyslexia in 6th grade and above.

While some may continue to argue that dyslexia legislation leads to the gross overidentification of dyslexia, the data simply do not support these claims. Sadly, the data suggest that even with dyslexia legislation in place, states are still struggling to identify children who have difficulty with reading due to dyslexia.

These data stress the need for the center to continue its work to aid educators in their efforts to identify and address the instructional needs of all children who struggle with reading, especially those whose difficulties are the result of dyslexia.
The term Structured Literacy refers to an approach to reading and spelling instruction that embodies key teaching methods and essential language content. The systematic and explicit approach of Structured Literacy instruction is very effective for students with characteristics of dyslexia, and, as indicated in the infographic, there is considerable evidence that it benefits all developing readers.

Structured Literacy instruction is distinguished by several key methods. Literacy content is taught in a systematic and cumulative manner. This means that content is organized from the most frequent and basic concepts of language to those that are more difficult, and that each subsequently introduced concept or skill is based on those previously learned. Instruction is also explicit, meaning all concepts are directly taught with abundant student-teacher interaction that allows for modeling, practice, and prompt corrective feedback. Diagnostic teaching ensures that instruction is differentiated based on continuous assessment of individual student needs and progress.

The language concepts essential to Structured Literacy instruction are:
- phonological and phonemic awareness (the sound structure of spoken words)
- sound-symbol association (including blending and segmenting for reading and spelling)
- syllabication (knowledge of syllable types and syllable division patterns)
- morphology (study of word meanings through base words, roots, prefixes, and suffixes)
- syntax (sentence construction and grammar)
- semantics (constructing meaning from written language)

The Center’s Dyslexia Success Series and district workshops are designed to increase educator depth of knowledge with the language concepts and instructional delivery methods characterized by Structured Literacy instruction.
The **Student Literacy Profile** was developed by center staff as a tool to aid schools in their efforts to identify a student’s instructional needs in the area of literacy. This two-page graphic organizer allows teams to compile data about a student’s literacy skills collected from a variety of sources, including:

- parent and teacher observations
- curriculum-embedded measures (CEM)
- curriculum-based measures (CBM)
- individually administered tests of achievement and phonological processing

Schools may use this tool to reveal which areas of literacy development are strengths or weaknesses for a particular student. This will help determine which skills should be targeted for reading instruction and intervention. The **Student Literacy Profile** also supports school teams in their efforts to identify students with characteristics of dyslexia.

**Version 3 of the Student Literacy Profile, updated in October 2018**, includes a detailed overview and directions for use. You can download a copy from the Educator and Parent Resources section of our website at mtsu.edu/dyslexia/publications.php.
Center News

Center Staff Achieve CALP Certification

Congratulations to Jennifer Flipse, Erin Alexander, and Melinda Hirschmann for achieving national certification as Certified Academic Language Practitioners (CALP) through the Academic Language Therapy Association (ALTA). They qualified for this certification after completing a one-year training course, the associated practicum, and passing the Alliance National Registration Examination.

Recent State, Regional, National, and International Conference Presentations


“Dyslexia in the Schools: What School Psychologists Need to Know” presented by Erin Alexander at the Mid-South Conference for Psychology in the Schools, Huntsville, Alabama, Oct. 16, 2018


“Modernizing Orton-Gillingham Methodologies” presented by Tim Odegard, Emily Farris, and others at the 2018 annual conference of the International Dyslexia Association, Manshantucket, Connecticut, Oct. 27, 2018

“Trouble with Words: an Overview of Dyslexia; 10 Strategies to Maximize Your Small Group Reading Intervention; Phonemes and Graphemes and Morphemes... Oh My!” presented by Melinda Hirschmann at the 2018 annual conference of the Literacy Association of TN, Murfreesboro, Dec. 3, 2018
FY 2018 Update

Tennessee Center for the Study and Treatment of Dyslexia

Mission

Education
Research
Community

OVER THE PAST YEAR, EDUCATORS FROM
52 SCHOOL SYSTEMS HAVE ATTENDED OUR EVENTS

2 publications
5 presentations

Identified with Characteristics of Dyslexia

Students from 26 COUNTIES EVALUATED

Did you know?

OF MAY EVALUATION APPLICANTS WERE IDENTIFIED IN THE SCHOOLS WITH AN IEP IN BASIC READING OR READING FLUENCY

17%

OF MAY EVALUATION APPLICANTS KNEW IDENTIFICATION COULD BE PERFORMED BY TESTING WITHIN THEIR SCHOOL

88%

OF MAY EVALUATION APPLICANTS WERE IDENTIFIED PREVIOUSLY WITH CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSLEXIA

67%

OF MAY EVALUATION APPLICANTS HAD PREVIOUSLY REQUESTED AN EVALUATION FOR IDENTIFICATION WITHIN THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOL

9%

SCHOOL ATTENDED BY EVALUATION APPLICANTS

22% HOME SCHOOL
78% PUBLIC SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

3 On-Campus Conferences
14 Dyslexia Success Series Workshops

In-Service Workshops

1,419

Educators attended 21 workshops throughout Tennessee

Dyslexia Success Series

283

Parents and educators registered for the Dyslexia Success Series workshops

Events at MTSU

307

Educators attended our on-campus events
Workshops and Conferences

Registration Is Now Open for These Events:

**Dyslexia Success Series**

Dyslexia Success Series workshops for educators continue on Feb. 23, and March 16. Topics include:

- Direct Vocabulary Instruction: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, presented by Jennifer Flipse, Ph.D.
- Reading Comprehension Strategies at the Sentence, Paragraph, and Text Level, presented by Jennifer Flipse, Ph.D.

A parent-focused Dyslexia Success Series workshop on Feb. 23 will offer information on

- Understanding School-Based Identification of Characteristics of Dyslexia, presented by Erin Alexander
- Structured Literacy Instruction: What It Is and Why It Works, presented by Emily Farris, Ph.D.

**Explicit Instruction:**

Explicit Instruction: The Magic Is in the Instruction March 22–23, 2019, presented by Anita Archer, Ph.D.

To optimize learning, students require bell-to-bell instruction; clear lesson goals; structured lessons with an introduction, body, and close; embedded formative assessment; active participation; consistent monitoring of performance; effective feedback; and judicious practice. Dr. Archer will review the research on explicit instruction and demonstrate its application across grade levels and domains. The first day will focus on the design of instruction and the second day on the delivery of instruction.