

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

# Newsletter

## Special Topic: The Literacy Studies Practicum

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The program incorporates field experiences to provide its students with opportunities to practice their skills in environments where they are exposed to current issues in literacy practice.

One such experience is the practicum, which requires 60 clock hours in the field. Students may register for a practicum experience no earlier than their second year in the program, having completed a minimum of 20 credit hours of coursework within the core and at least 6 credit hours in the area of specialization.

Practicum experiences are designed to provide students with appropriate experiences related to their areas of specialization.

For example, a student concentrating in Literacy Instruction and Staff Development might work with a district curriculum supervisor and gain hands-on experience in the evaluation of curriculum materials and/or providing support and in-service training to teachers. A student concentrating in Reading Disabilities might be placed in a Title-I or Special Education program to gain hands-on experience diagnosing reading disabilities and providing support and in-service training to the teachers who provide remedial instruction. A student concentrating in Administration / Policy might be placed in the Tennessee State Board of Education for hands-on experience in education law and policy.

Given the commitment of the program to create long-standing partnerships with organizations whose needs its Ph.D. students can help meet, the practicum should be designed to provide a service to the sponsoring organization.

It is a requirement of the program that clearly defined expectations for field work be established through contractual agreements between students and on-site supervisors. The contracts will detail the activities to be engaged in and the work product(s) expected, as well as the nature and frequency of training and supportive supervision to be provided. All contracts and placements must be approved by Dr. Blackwell, the current practicum coordinator.

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## The practicum: Missie Stugart's experience



Completing a Ph.D. program is both an exciting and intimidating process, as we have all learned by now. Our program requires us to jump through a variety of hoops designed to prepare us for careers in the field of literacy. While each hoop provides us with rewarding experience, it can be a little frightening to figure out how to best navigate the trajectory. The practicum experience is no

exception.

The literacy practicum may be attempted once you have logged 20 hours of coursework. For myself, I waited until I had completed all of my coursework before attempting the practicum. I wanted to be prepared with a full picture of literacy, while feeling that I had enough time to devote entirely to the project without

## Practicum by Missie Stugart (continued)

distraction of other homework or service learning experiences. However, embedding it into your coursework can also help guide your future studies by helping you to develop your interests. Regardless of when you complete the practicum, it is essential that you find ways to connect with your literacy studies. It is an experience aimed at helping you to solidify your literacy knowledge through practice!

I completed my practicum at the high school at which I teach English. It was important that my project connect with my career as a literacy practitioner and help students I care deeply about. To accomplish this, I worked closely with my colleagues to plan and implement an afterschool reading program two afternoons a week for low readers in my school. I began by completing the Practicum Intent to Register Form and then worked with my executive principal to complete the Practicum Course Contract. Making sure that all parties involved are clear on the objectives and

goals for your project is important because it allows you to be more focused. In this case, my project was so successful I have continued the reading program on my own time to continue meeting the needs of my school. I have even since started a lunchtime tutoring program with a biology teacher at my school who became more interested in science literacy for low performers after she saw the benefits of the afternoon tutoring in her classes.

One of the most important parts of the practicum experience is the maintenance of a practicum log. When setting out to complete my 60 hours of service, I calculated the number of weeks in a semester and the number of hours a week I'd need to work in order to complete the hours. I also gave myself some time on the front end to work on recruitment and communication before diving right in. My time frame allowed for 15 weeks, so I determined to work two afternoons a

week for two hours each. The log helped me to stay focused on both my short and long term goals through the process. Reflecting on each day helped me to process what I could do differently or what I did well each day, while reading back on my past reflections helped me to find trends in student performance and participation.

The best advice I can give to students beginning to consider the literacy practicum experience is the following: 1) Choose a literacy project for which you have passion. 2) Don't necessarily choose something you know everything about. Even though I was working with my own high school students, I learned a lot about diagnosis and assessment, which are not areas of expertise for me. Challenge yourself! 3) Plan early and involve as many parties as possible. The more connections you make, the more people you help and the more people you have to help you! 4) Be consistent. Set up a regular schedule and stick with it.

## The practicum: Rachel Peay Cornett's experience



Rachel Peay Cornett has been a student in the Literacy Studies program since

the summer of 2009 and is currently the treasurer of the Literacy Studies Graduate Student Association. **Rachel was just selected by the TN State Education Department as one of only 30 educators across the state to serve on the K-8 Reading textbook adoption commission.** Congratulations, Rachel! Below, she shares her thoughts about the practicum.

I am a full time first grade teacher with Rutherford County Schools at Wilson Elementary where I have been fulfilling my lifetime dream of becoming an educator for six years now and loving it. As early as I can remember I've had the desire to become a teacher and follow in my mother's

footsteps, because my mother, Pat, is also a Rutherford County educator at Siegel Middle. Being a local gal growing up on my parents' farm just miles down the road from MTSU, I was attracted to the fact that the university was first established as a teacher training college and completed both my undergraduate and Master's coursework at Middle with specialization in Early Childhood Education. One interesting fact about me is that I actually met my husband, Kyle, when we were both undergrads on campus and Kyle was employed at one of the help desks in Walker Library. He is now also a graduate student at MTSU. In my spare time I like to travel, teach dance lessons, and

participate in a variety of creative crafts.

I began my focus on literacy during my undergrad coursework at MTSU when I became involved as a spokesperson for several of the local literacy organizations such as Books from Birth and Read Across America. It did not take me long after beginning my professional career to realize that I desired to learn more about exactly what it takes to teach children to read. While I find that teaching reading at the acquisition age is very exhilarating, it really is rocket science, as Louisa Moats would say. It only made sense when I saw the flyer for MTSU's new Literacy Program that I'd apply- and what a great experience it has been for me! While pursuing my coursework part time in the school year and full time in the summers, it is hard to believe that I am now enjoying the practicum phase of

the program. With my previous experience as a spokesperson for local literacy organizations and having completed several service-learning projects with Read to Succeed, I turned immediately to Read to Succeed's director, Lisa Mitchell, when I needed a practicum placement with a supervisor involved in world of literacy. I am currently working around the clock with this non-profit in all aspects of what it takes to keep the reading initiative working effective in our community. The best part of the practicum is that I get the opportunity to take all of my knowledge accumulated in the program's coursework and apply it to literacy needs, outside of my own classroom walls. Recently, I was asked to speak at a literacy forum at the local library with a panel of other literacy experts. Although it is a challenge that keeps me on my toes, I am enjoying using research to inform my advisement of the current programs initiated by the Read to Suc-

ceed organization, including adult literacy, English language learning programs, and family literacy programming. Visit Read to Succeed's website to learn more information about their organization or sign up for the newsletter: [www.readtosucceed.org](http://www.readtosucceed.org)

As for my own research interests, my work with Read to Succeed has peeked my interest in family literacy and the benefits of students partaking in literacy related opportunities with the support of their families. Upon completion of my degree I desire to stay a part of the classroom while helping foster better teacher preparation programs. Another future goal is to be a liaison between the worlds of current research and the everyday classroom. Luckily, my experiences with both the program and my practicum are helping pave the way for my future success in the field of literacy.

## Faculty announcements

Dr. Kim is thinking about offering a **free, nonmathematical, and interactive statistics seminar** for those who want to get rid of stat-phobia. He is considering offering this seminar on May 7th and 8th, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Students don't need to register for any course since it is free and carries no credit. It may give you a chance to actually understand and enjoy statistics. Dr. Kim will talk about what statistics is, why we need it, and what kind of statistical methods are available for data analysis in social and behavioral sciences in general and in literacy studies specifically. Please let Dr. Kim know if you are interested in this opportunity.

The **6th Annual Linguistics Olympiad** was held on Saturday, January 28, 2012. Dr. Blackwell owes a **huge thanks** to the following Literacy Studies Ph.D. students and faculty who were able to assist with this year's competition: Sue Amundrud, Rachel Peay Cornett, Kimberly McKay, Andrea Milligan, Penny Thompsom, and Dr. Cyrille Magne.

Approximately 90 students participated in this year's competition. The participating high schools were Blackman, Brentwood, Centennial, Central Magnet, Franklin, LaVergne, Merrol Hyde Magnet, Ravenwood, Riverdale, and Siegel. The participating middle schools were Blackman, Greenway School, Head Math and Science Academy, Heritage, Sunset, West End IB, and West Valley.

Results of the competition can be found at [www.mtsu.edu/lo](http://www.mtsu.edu/lo).





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## Program News

### STUDENT SELF-EVALUATIONS

March is the time of the year for student self-evaluations. You may find the forms here: [http://www.mtsu.edu/literacy/forms/Student\\_Self-Evaluation\\_Form.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/literacy/forms/Student_Self-Evaluation_Form.pdf). Please submit to [Aleka.Blackwell@mtsu.edu](mailto:Aleka.Blackwell@mtsu.edu) by April 15, 2012.

### SPRING COLLOQUIA

**March 21** Dr. Laurie Cutting, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Reading Clinic  
**April 18** Melissa Brock, Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program ABD

### LITS PROGRAM GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPORT

The LITS Graduate Student Association met on Thursday, February 9. We have invited members to submit requests for Fall 2012 SGA funds and will submit these requests later this semester. Possibilities for funding include conference travel & fees, test protocols for research, bringing a guest speaker to campus, etc. The LITS delegates to the MTSU GSA have been asked to discuss the student activity fee at the next MTSU GSA meeting (for example, would it be possible to "split the pot" into graduate and undergraduate so that graduate student fees fund graduate student activities). Finally, the LITS GSA is planning a student mixer somewhere in Nashville later this semester. Details coming soon!

## Looking ahead

### FALL SCHEDULE

ELED 7250 From Policy to Practice in American Public Schools T 6-9 pm  
ENGL 7520 Essentials of Linguistics W 5-8 pm  
LITS 7100 Historical Issues, Trends & Methodologies of Literacy R 5-8 pm  
LITS 7210 Evidence-Based Methods of Literacy Development, Sept. 21-22, Oct. 26-27, Nov. 16-17, F 4:30 – 8:30 p.m., S 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
PSY 7280 Psychological Statistics: Regression, TR 4:20 – 5:45 p.m.  
PSY 7585 Test Construction and Validation, M 5-8 pm (pre-requisite is PSY 7280)  
LITS 7330 Special Topics in Literacy (contact individual LITS faculty)  
LITS 7200 Practicum (contact Dr. Blackwell to discuss practicum placement)  
LITS 7640 Dissertation Research

### Electives/Check Raidernet for meeting times

DYST 6010 – Identifying Students with Dyslexia  
PSY 7580 – Multivariate Data Analysis  
SPED 6780 – Issues in Special Education  
SPSE 6140 – Teacher Leadership for School Improvement  
YOED 6680 – Issues & Trends in Teaching & Learning  
READ 6000 – Foundations of Literacy  
HHP 7300 – Current Measurement Issues in Health & Human Performance

### General advice:

1. Discuss your course schedule with your academic advisor.
2. Priority registration for summer and fall is April 2-13, 2012.
3. Contact Dr. Blackwell if you plan to register for the practicum.
4. Contact Dr. Kim if you plan to take the preliminary examinations.

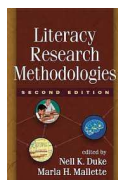
### Upcoming conferences

**TN IDA 10th Annual RISE Conference**, Saturday, April 21, 2012. [www.tnida.org](http://www.tnida.org). Currey Ingram Academy, Brentwood, TN. Register by April 1 for student rate of \$30.

### Publications of interest



**Research Methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners** by Ranjit Kumar. It breaks the process of designing and doing a research project into eight manageable steps and provides plenty of examples to link theory to the practice of doing research. Third edition, 2010, 440 pages.



**Literacy Research Methodologies** edited by Nell Duke and Marla Mallette. A number of scholars describe established and emerging methodologies, discuss the types of questions and claims for which each is best suited, identify standards of quality, and present exemplary studies that illustrate the approaches at their best. This collection covers 18 approaches and addresses mixed methods, narrative approaches, single-subject experimental design, and research in digital contexts. Second edition, 2011, 488 pages.



**Teaching to Exceed the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: A Literacy Practices Approach for 6-12 Classrooms** by Richard Beech, Amanda Haertling Thein, and Allen Webb. This text addresses how the Standards' highest and best intentions for student success can be implemented from a critical, culturally relevant perspective that is firmly grounded in current literacy learning theory and research. To be released April 5, 2012.