

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

Newsletter

Staff Profile: Angela Morrell

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Angela Morrell is the secretary for the Ph.D. Program in Literacy

Studies. Ms. Morrell graduated from MTSU with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in 1997, has been married for 25 years, and has two children, one currently enrolled at MTSU and one who plans to enroll in the near future. Ms. Morrell worked for the Tennessee Center for the Study and Treatment of Dyslexia at MTSU in the past.

"I have always loved to learn and enjoy working in the university

environment. It is such a pleasure interacting with both the faculty and the students. It is exciting to be a part of such a genuinely wonderful, interdisciplinary team who work so well together with integrity, and are devoted to their work, this program, the students, and furthering literacy education."

Ms. Morrell's office is located at COE 316. Her office hours are 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday – Thursday.

Student Profile: Davonna Thomas



While I was always a good student who loved school, I struggled for a long time to find my path. As much as I loved learning and teaching, I never pursued a teaching certificate. Something just didn't feel right about it. I earned my undergraduate degree in music and English, and I decided to give

music a try the first time around. I earned a Master's degree in Arts Management at Columbia College, and it was towards the end of that program that some things started to "click." Many of the students in my program were not your typical college students. My colleagues included rappers, producers, retired ballerinas, and actors. Within a couple semesters, I had been identified as "the good writer" and became the unofficial writing tutor for my program. I was so incredibly happy and fulfilled tutoring my friends that I almost forgot about arts management! All of a sudden, my hesitance to get my teaching certificate made sense—I was supposed to be working with *adult* learners. I read countless job ads for college-level writing and reading instructors, trying to figure out what my next step should be. Since

most ads required an MA in English, I planned accordingly.

I was accepted into the English MA program at Loyola University and worked through the program one or two classes at a time. Two of the courses in this program gave me the "literacy bug." One was History of the English Language (with a heavy dose of phonology) and the other was Teaching College Composition. I began to seek out experiences in adult literacy. I volunteered as a tutor at the university writing center and served as a teaching assistant for a freshman composition. The semester after I finished my MA, I got a job teaching freshman composition at the College of Lake County. My first year as a college instructor confirmed my passion for adult education. Adult learners keep you

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Student Profile (continued)

on your toes! They demand an education that is useful in their personal and professional lives. If they feel like they aren't learning the skills they need, they will let you know!

I spent a lot of time that winter doing a national job search for community college teaching positions. The job market was competitive, and the economy was down, so I didn't have any luck. I quickly realized that I needed to seek out a doctoral program to be a viable candidate; furthermore, I wanted to learn more about the "nuts and bolts" of literacy. I started to look around

for language and literacy PhD programs in the Chicago area, and I was not happy with what I found. Around that same time, my husband got a job offer at a small cartographic firm in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. I remember saying to him, "Wouldn't it be great if there was a college in Murfreesboro that had a PhD program in literacy?" The rest, as they say, is history.

Now, I am a busy second-year student MTSU's Literacy Studies program, starting to think about things like the comprehensive exam, my practicum, and of course – my dissertation! I have worked

with Dr. Brea-Spahn, Dr. Kim, and Dr. Fain on research projects. In addition, I have taught a section of READ1000 (developmental reading) at MTSU and conducted literature circles for READ1000 students. Currently, I am coordinating a Center for Dyslexia grant that provides after school reading tutoring for 1st through 5th graders in the Murfreesboro City Schools. I am grateful for the wide range of both academic and applied experiences I have had as a Literacy Studies student at MTSU, and I can't wait to see what happens next!

Student Profile: Penny Thompson



As stated in the book of Ecclesiastes, *to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven*. I believe this to be 'the time and the season' for me to embrace an exciting phase of life as a new student in the Ph.D of Literacy Studies program. I am presently enrolled in my second semester and am truly enjoying this program.

Family has always been my priority, which contributes to the fact that I am just now pursuing this degree. I have been married for 28 years, live in Alexandria, Tennessee, and have two grown children. Megan is a stylist in Lebanon and Drew is an English teacher in Zamora, Spain. My family supports me and often provides encouragement to achieve

my educational goals. Presently my goal is to obtain my degree for both my own personal growth and to make a significant contribution to education. Future plans include teaching at the graduate level, expanding leadership roles and possible authorship.

My career in education began twenty-five years ago with a passion for teaching reading. After earning my Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education at Belmont University, I began teaching the early grades of first, second, and transitional-first grade. My career first began in Navasota Independent School District located in Navasota, Texas. Next I taught at Mt. Juliet Christian Academy in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee and finally in the Lebanon Special School District in 1991. I truly enjoyed the challenge of teaching students the skills necessary to excel in reading and also receiving the reward of having students excel by the end of first grade. My favorite students to teach were the struggling students that required much more effort and intervention. I have always believed in the capacity of every student to be able to learn. In 2000 I earned my Master's degree in supervision and administration from Tennessee Tech University and left the classroom to become assistant principal at Byars Dowdy Elementary School. This position gave me a perspective of instructional leadership and school management that was both valuable and significant for training me to become a

leader. By 2003 I had earned my Ed.S degree in supervision and administration at TTU which led me to the position that I now have as Instructional Supervisor with the Lebanon Special School District. In this central office position I have many responsibilities working with teachers and principals of pre-k through 8th grade. These responsibilities include supervising the pre-k program, coordinating district instructional programs, textbook and materials coordination, mentoring programming, staff development, cooperating with universities for student teacher placement and programs, and early childhood programming. I enjoy this role and am grateful to work with educational leaders who are visionary, resilient, and dedicated to doing what is best for students. Additionally, I have taught as adjunct professor at Cumberland University the past few years. Upon receiving my degree I plan to continue working at LSSD but with more knowledge to be able to lead and make more informed decisions for students

I have always desired to obtain my Ph.D and knew that when the time was right and when a program was offered to meet my interests that I would pursue the degree. Upon hearing about the Ph.D in Literacy Studies, I recognized the Literacy Studies program to be the opportunity that I was seeking. So I guess in summary I would say that 'now is the time and the season' for continuing my education.



Upcoming conference presentations by faculty and students

- Brasher, Casey. Comparison of Progress Monitoring Practices and School Psychologists' Roles. 2012 National Association of School Psychologists Annual Convention.
- Marx, Jo Ann & Kim, Jwa. The effects of self-regulated rate reduction and pausing on decoding, reading, comprehension, and fluency. Mid-South Educational Research Association, Nov. 2011.
- Thomas, Davonna. Paper to be presented at the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education (SCALE) virtual conference, Nov. 2011.
- Thomas, Davonna. Literature Circles as a Part of the Postsecondary Developmental Reading Classroom. Adult and Continuing Education National Conference, Nov. 2011.
- Thomas, Davonna. Literature Circles: An AAVE Perspective. Tennessee Reading Association Conference, Dec. 2011.
- Thomas, Davonna. Literature Circles as a Part of the Postsecondary Developmental Reading Classroom. Paper to be co-presented at the International Reading Association Conference, Apr. 2012.
- Waters, Beth & Kim, Jwa. Effects of systematic error correction procedures on reading achievement and comprehension. Mid-South Educational Research Association, Nov. 2011.

Announcements

The MTSU Literacy Studies Graduate Student Association

After being inactive for the several years, the MTSU Graduate Student Association was restored as an official student organization this year. Rachel Peay and Davonna Thomas serve as MTSU GSA delegates, representing the Literacy Studies program. It was through networking with other delegates from programs with their own departmental GSAs that the idea came about to form a Literacy Studies GSA. As of October 5, 2011, the Literacy Studies Graduate Student Association is an official MTSU student organization. The mission of the LITS GSA is to unite the Literacy Studies PhD students at MTSU. The LITS GSA will provide networking, professional development, and academic enrichment for its members. It will serve as a unified voice which will advocate for the best possible graduate school experience for its students. Dr. Amy Elleman serves as the LITS GSA faculty advisor. The LITS GSA is currently in the nomination process of the first-ever officer elections. LITS GSA members are also submitting proposals for Spring 2012 funding from the student activity fee budget. The LITS GSA's primary means of communication is its Google Group page and email list, so all LITS students are strongly encouraged to join the Google Group. If you have any questions about signing up for the Google Group, please contact Davonna Thomas at davonnathomas@gmail.com.

Looking ahead...

Spring Colloquia

7-8 p.m.

February 15

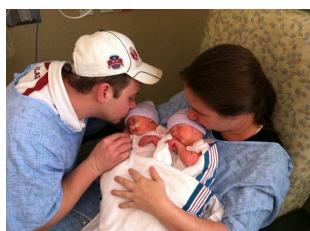
March 21

April 18

Faculty and Student News

Congratulations to...

Casey Brasher and her family on the arrival of their twin girls, Hadley and Harper, born on Oct. 21, 2011.



...and...

Dr. Jwa Kim who completed a half-marathon on October 15, 2011, in 2 hours, 7 minutes, and 59 seconds!



Publications (alphabetically)

Blackwell, A. A. (2011). Review article of M. Л. Кисилиер (отв. ред.), *Лингвистическая и этнокультурная ситуация в селах Приазовья. По материалам экспедиций 2001–2004 годов*. Санкт-Петербург: Алетейя [M. L. Kisilier (ed.), *The Linguistic and Ethno-Cultural Situation in the Greek Villages of the Azov Region: Based on Materials from the 2001-2004 Expedition*, St. Petersburg: Aleteya, 2009, p. 448], *Journal of Greek Linguistics*, 11 (2), 275-279.

Dunkel, K., Kim, J. & Papini, D. (to appear). The General Factor of Psychosocial Development and its Relation to the General Factor of Personality and Life History Strategy. *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Fain, J. G. (in press). Should English Only Be Part of Curriculum & Instruction in Schools? In Eakle, J. (Ed.). *Debating Issues in American Education/ Curriculum & Instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fain, J. G. & Horn, R. (2011). Valuing Home Language in Bilingual Conversations. In R. J. Meyer & Whitmore, K. (Eds.). *Reclaiming Reading: Teachers, Students, and Researchers Regaining Spaces for Thinking and Action*. New York: Routledge.

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Program News

The program hosted the following guest speakers in fall 2011.

September 21, 2011. Dr. Aimee Holt, MTSU, presented the lecture *Hierarchical Reading Skills Analysis: Implications for Intervention Design and Progress Monitoring*.

October 19, 2011. Dr. Deborah Rowe, Vanderbilt University, presented the lecture *Even Scribbles Have a Plan: What Preschoolers Can Teach Us about Writing and Learning to Write*.

October 27, 2011. Dr. Michael Hebert, Vanderbilt University, presented the lecture *Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading*.

Looking ahead

SPRING 2012 COURSES (CORE AND ELECTIVES)

LITS 7011 NEUROBIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

(Dr. Magne, M 6-9 p.m., COE 107, pre-req CDIS 6000, ENGL 7520, or pretest)

LITS 7110 MODELS OF LITERACY ASSESSMENT

(Dr. Elleman, T 5-8 p.m., DYS 116, POD)

LITS 7130 LITERACY IN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

(Dr. Fain, W 5-8 p.m., COE 104, pre-req CDIS 6000 or ENGL 7520)

LITS 7140 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY IN LITERACY

(Dr. Elleman, R 5-8 p.m., DYS 116, POD)

LITS 7330 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERACY (Ind. Study with LITS Faculty)

LITS 7200 PRACTICUM (Dr. Blackwell)

LITS 7640 DISSERTATION RESEARCH (with Dissertation Director)

ELED 7350 INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE METHODS

(Dr. Burris, T 5-8 p.m., COE 142, POD)

SOC 6720 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

(Dr. Webber, M 6-9 p.m., TODD 210, POD)

PSY 7210 ADVANCED PSYCHOMETRICS

(Dr. Kim, M 5-8 p.m., COE 247, pre-req PSY 7280)

PSY 7290 PSYCHOLOGICAL STATISTICS: ANOVA

(Dr. Sullivan, TR 4:20-5:45 p.m., BAS S314, pre-req PSY 7280)

PSY 6750 PSYCHOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

(Dr. Holt, T/R 11:20 a.m. - 12:45 p.m., COE 244, POD)

SPSE 6140 TEACHER LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

(Dr. Mincey, T 4:30-7:30 p.m., COE 246, POD)

YOED 6680 ISSUES AND TRENDS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

(Dr. Mincey, M 4:30-7:30 p.m., COE 148, POD)

NOTE: The program has requested that core courses shown with 5 p.m. starting times be changed on Pipeline, too. Please check Pipeline to be sure the starting time is officially 5 p.m. before registering if you have a conflict.

The National Endowment for the Arts invites applications for next year's *The Big Read*

The Big Read, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with Arts Midwest designed to revitalize the role of literature in American culture and to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment, is accepting applications from nonprofit organizations to develop community-wide reading programs between September 2012 and June 2013.

Organizations selected to participate in The Big Read receive a grant, access to online training resources and opportunities, and educational and promotional materials designed to support wide-spread community involvement and participation. Approximately 75 organizations in communities of varying sizes across the United States will be selected to participate in next year's The Big Read.

Community organizations participating in The Big Read are expected to develop and produce a well-planned, well-attended, community-wide reading program with innovative, diverse programming, and widespread community involvement and participation. Activities should last approximately one month and focus on one book or poet from The Big Read library (<http://www.neabigread.org/books.php>).

Organizations may apply for grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000 each, depending on community size and number of activities planned. Grants must be matched at least 1 to 1 with nonfederal funds. Grant funds may be used for such expenses as book purchases, speaker fees and travel, salaries, advertising, and venue rental.

Visit The Big Read website (http://www.neabigread.org/application_process.php) for complete program guidelines.

Note: No community in Tennessee participated in the 2011-2012 The Big Read (<http://www.neabigread.org/communities.php>), so let's change that for 2012-2013.