USU’s Literacy Clinic Shines
by Tori Holcomb
Visit the Literacy Clinic and you will see a unique setting that brings together children, parents, classroom teachers, USU teacher education students, and language and literacy specialists. Under the guidance of Dr. Cindy Jones, Literacy Center Director, the goal of this community outreach program is to aid public schools in helping elementary students develop their reading and writing skills while providing preservice teachers mentored training in delivering literacy instruction. (Continued on p. 5.)
Meet Our New Faculty

In Fall 2016, Dr. Marla Robertson joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. She earned her PhD from Texas Woman’s University, her B.S. from BYU, and her Master’s from SUU. Her dissertation was titled: *Influences on Teacher Decision-Making about Writing Instruction in a High-Stakes Writing Assessment Grade*. Dr. Robertson was a finalist for the International Literacy Association’s 2015 Outstanding Dissertation Award.

Dr. Robertson taught in Title I elementary schools in Texas and Utah and was a Teacher Consultant for the North Star of Texas Writing Project. Dr. Robertson’s research centers on the intersection of literacy, professional development, assessment policies, and teacher education. Dr. Robertson enjoys reading Young Adult novels, creating family history artifacts, and keeping up with her husband and four adult children. Welcome Dr. Robertson!

Reading Endorsement Course Enhances Literacy Instructional Practices

In Fall 2016, Dr. Sylvia Read’s *Teaching with Children’s Literature and Informational Texts* (TEAL 6390) course, the students explored using children’s literature and informational text to support the objectives in the core curriculum, especially those related to vocabulary and comprehension. They searched for research and research-based articles on effective strategies for teaching vocabulary and comprehension; then, they wrote lesson plans that incorporated the article as well as a piece of children’s literature or an informational text written for children. Their final projects are available as open resources on this website: [http://teachingwithbooks.weebly.com/](http://teachingwithbooks.weebly.com/).

Student, Kayse Fernades, shares a book with the class.

Are you interested in obtaining a Reading Endorsement through USU? Individuals are welcomed in courses that provide insight and cutting edge instructional strategies and techniques. See [http://teal.usu.edu/professional-advancement/reading-endorsment](http://teal.usu.edu/professional-advancement/reading-endorsment) for more information on how to enroll.
Meet Our New Faculty

Dr. Amy Piotrowski is a new assistant professor with the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. She specializes in English education. She recently graduated from Florida State University with a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Before that, she taught middle school and high school English in Texas for ten years.

Dr. Piotrowski’s research interests include 21st century literacies, digital literacy, young adult literature and adolescent literacy, and teacher education. She is working from USU’s Uintah Basin campus in Vernal. She enjoys the beautiful mountains and the great hiking available in the Basin. Welcome Dr. Piotrowski!

Two Literacy Education and Leadership Doctoral Students Secure Prestigious Scholarship

Submitted by Kathleen Mohr

One of the most prestigious opportunities at Utah State University is the Presidential Doctoral Research Fellowship (PDRF). PDRF students receive significant funding, mentorship, and the training necessary to assist them in becoming leaders in their fields of study. PDRFs comprise an interdisciplinary cohort, offering the unique opportunity to develop academic relationships with researchers and scholars at USU and beyond and with doctoral students across disciplines.

Following a competitive selection process, faculty must propose unique research opportunities and recruit high-quality students to be awarded a PDRF. There are only approximately 15 PDRFs across the University. The School of Teacher Education and Leadership currently has two PDRF students: Stephanie Juth and Guoqin Ding.

Stephanie Juth grew up in Manitou Springs, Colorado, but received her first degree in Elementary Education at the University of Wyoming. Her Master of Arts degree in Reading was earned at the University of Northern Colorado. Steph worked in public education for 17 years, teaching science and language arts in grades 4-12, and in various administrative roles before accepting the PDRF to be trained in research at USU. When Steph first visited USU, she was shown the Functional Near Infrared Spectroscopy lab on campus, which aligned with her interests in cognitive reading processes, specifically reading comprehension. Steph decided that exploring the neural correlates associated with reading via neuroscience technology would be an ideal fit for her as a doctoral student. She began her doctoral studies at USU in 2014 and is now nearing the end of her coursework (continued on p. 4).
Research Funding to Support At Risk High School Students

Dr. Nicole Pyle and Literacy Education and Leadership doctoral student Sally Brown have worked closely to design and implement interventions aimed at improving academic outcomes for secondary students with dropout risk indicators. Their current project is Literacy for Access to College and Texts (L-ACT): Utah Alternative High Schools (AHSs) College Readiness Partnership. L-ACT is a collaboration between Utah State University and AHSs in Utah to increase the number of underrepresented juniors and seniors who achieve ACT college-readiness benchmarks, read more proficiently, apply for college, and complete FAFSA by participation in 6 ACT tutorials, 6 reading/content intervention sessions, 2 college application and FAFSA events, and a college campus tour. The creation of an AHS State Leadership Team aims to improve AHS students’ college readiness by recommending effective strategies to prepare for and enroll in college, and developing an effective model for AHSs to implement for program sustainability.

Two Literacy Education and Leadership Doctoral Students Secure Prestigious Scholarship (Cont.)

Steph is currently exploring syntactic complexity and expository reading comprehension across digital ill-structured, non-linear, domains, such as websites. Her experiences at Utah State will lay the foundation for future research utilizing eye tracking and neuroimaging to gain greater understanding of the reading comprehension process, and the utility and effectiveness of reading interventions for at-risk students. Her goal is to gain knowledge and expertise in cognitive neuroscience by working on collaborative research projects in the Language Education and Auditory Processing (LEAP) Brain Imaging Laboratory, which is under the direction of Dr. Ron Gillam. A dual emphasis in literacy and neuroscience requires Steph to combine two different scholarly fields, but she contends that the PDRF supports that process. She notes:

The PDRF has afforded me an amazing opportunity to work and learn from leading researchers in the fields of literacy and speech and language pathology. I have the opportunity to be involved in literacy research utilizing innovative brain imaging and eye tracking technologies, which is allowing us to examine the complex, moment-by-moment processes involved during reading.

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Guoqin Ding received her bachelor and master’s degrees in China. She completed a bachelor’s degree in Harbin University of Science and Technology in 2005. After receiving her Master’s degree from Southwest (continued on p. 5).
Two Literacy and Educational Doctoral Students Secure Prestigious Scholarship (Continued)

University in Chongqing in 2008, she began work as a college English teacher. Her six years of language teaching in China interested her in the achievement of English learners, especially those who struggle in reading and writing English even though they receive English instruction from the age of six. The desire to help students develop their second language skills inspired her to pursue her Ph.D. in Education with a concentration in literacy. Guoqin began her doctoral journey in 2016. The PDRF allows Guoqin to study language and literacy development among bilingual learners from a cognitive perspective under the direction of Drs. Kathleen Mohr and Cindy Jones. The opportunity of joining the LEAP Brain Imaging Lab under the direction of Dr. Ron Gillam, expands her research interests into the field of neuroscience. Her current interest is in neuroeducation—how neuroscience might inform the ways we teach and learn multiple languages. A bilingual learner herself, Guoqin believes that by investigating cognitive and neural language processes in bilinguals, educators can design instruction and learning opportunities to improve bilinguals’ literacy achievement, especially in languages that do not share an alphabetic system.

USU’s Literacy Clinic Shines (Continued)

Literacy tutoring services are available for students in grades K-6 who are above, at, or below grade level readers. The literacy strengths and needs of each child are determined through diagnostic testing and a targeted intervention plan is developed. Utah State University teacher education students are given the opportunity to have their own mini-classroom teaching an elementary student and gain experience in classroom management, student assessment, and implementation of literacy instruction based on best practices. Since its inception in Fall 2013, hundreds of hours of tutoring services have been provided for local elementary school children.

As an education student at Utah State University, the training I received in the Literacy Clinic prepared me in ways nothing else could have in terms of providing literacy instruction and how to differentiate instruction based on a student’s needs. It was a wonderful experience being able to work one-on-one with my student and helping her (continued on p. 6).
USU’s Literacy Clinic Shines (Continued)

to improve her literacy skills. I was able to connect with my student on an individual level and I was able to incorporate some of her interests and likes into our lessons each week. Watching her confidence grow and seeing her start to enjoy reading was such a rewarding aspect of tutoring in the Literacy Clinic. I actually felt like I was making a difference in this child’s life because I was able to see her growth each week.

Not only did the Literacy Clinic provide me mentored training in literacy instruction, but it gave me many experiences to work with and learn from other education students. Through the use of two-way observation mirrors, I received feedback from peers that I was able to consider and use to refine future lessons. I benefitted greatly from receiving feedback from other tutors for each lesson I taught and by observing other tutors in order to improve my instruction.

Some of the training that tutors receive in the Literacy Clinic include giving and evaluating assessments in order to determine student needs, what instructional areas to focus on, and what areas students have improved on. Tutors also receive training on using best practices, using a variety of reading programs and strategies, and implementing classroom management and incentive plans. Tutors get many opportunities to try out different reading programs and strategies in order to best fit the needs of their individual students, which isn’t always possible in an elementary classroom where one reading program is used school-wide.

The practicum experience provided in the Literacy Clinic helped prepare me for my student teaching experiences. Working with a student for an entire semester, implementing my own classroom rules and procedures, and designing instruction that was specifically for that individual student help me to apply everything I had been learning up to that point. No experience could replace the value of what I learned from being a part of the Literacy Clinic program.

Written by Tori Holcomb

Do you know a child who could benefit from services offered by the Literacy Clinic?

Check out this link for more information:  http://earlychildhoodeducation.usu.edu/htm/literacy-clinic