



LITERACY MATTERS

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LITERACY
N A S S A U

Literacy Matters is a recurring publication of Literacy Nassau, Inc.

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JULIE'S SUMMER READING CHALLENGE

(submitted by Karen Micciche)

As you'll read in this issue of Literacy Matters, Kim, Kate and I are so excited to be working with a new Orton-Gillingham Fellow. Jennings (Jenni) Miller hails from Decatur, GA, and has been in private practice there for over ten years. She is going to oversee our training and support us for the next three years of study in our quest to become Academy of Orton Gillingham Fellows ourselves.

To get started with her, our first order of business was to shadow and assist with a Zoom training for new practitioners in the Atlanta area held from June 15th-19th. The training was fascinating - I couldn't count the number of times I heard something new that I felt should have been so elementary! And because Jenni's in private practice, she works with over thirty children a week, so her delivery model is extremely down-to-earth and accessible for little ones. Watching her train these teachers, and learning all of these new ways to reach kids got me thinking.

Most of you know that my daughters go to the Waldorf School of Garden City. One of the tenets of the school is to keep children media free so they can fully participate in the real world that surrounds them. Unfortunately, the pandemic challenged

this ideal by offering students the opportunity to use Zoom for their daily main lesson and for several of their subject classes. This worked for Haley, who was in the second grade, but it left my daughter, Julie, with little to do during what would have been her school time, as the early childhood children were not offered Zoom in keeping with the school's philosophy on screens and media.

As you can imagine, Julie got herself in quite a bit of trouble. Kindergarten is all about socialization: learning how to play with friends, share, be helpful, do chores, etc. Unfortunately, that requires a trusted teacher to guide little ones, and peers to interact with. While Julie certainly had Mommy and Daddy there to watch and play with her, it wasn't the same as being in school. She watched with envy as Haley got to "see" her friends on Zoom daily. She begged for the chance to do the same, but since she was in kindergarten, we wanted to respect the school's values. We tried to keep her busy with outdoor activities like tennis (which resulted in her breaking her arm) and even simply knitting (during which she accidentally impaled herself in the leg with a knitting needle).

In Waldorf, children are intentionally not given an academic curriculum until the first
(continued on next page)

THOUGHTS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Hi Everyone,

If you've been reading my column each month, you know that we've had a pretty rough go of it with injuries over the past few weeks. What I haven't mentioned is that my husband, Chris, got a herniated disc in his lower back earlier this month.

If you've ever experienced a herniated disc (I haven't), you know that it's incredibly painful. Sometimes it's a slow ache, other times it feels like your nerve endings are on fire. And also, the pain can move. It put my poor husband out for like a month, making even walking extremely uncomfortable. He finally got a cortisone shot this week, and he's starting to feel better.

Our first inclination was to freak out. I mean, we had *plans* this summer. But then we took a breath and realized that plans can change, and things will still be okay. We are trying to surrender our own will to the will of the universe and just let things unfold as they may. It's a challenge but it's really helping us all feel more calm - which is important for our girls, especially during such a strange time in their childhood.

Karen 😊



Even though our plans for this summer were totally rearranged, we managed to make the most of it. Staying healthy is really the most important thing to us right now!





WARM WELCOME TO JENNINGS MILLER, ORTON-GILLINGHAM FELLOW

(submitted by Kim Nau)

Literacy Nassau would like to welcome our new Academy of Orton-Gillingham Fellow, Jennings Miller. She will be working with our new cohort of Orton-Gillingham (OG) practitioners. Karen Micciche and I are now Fellows in Training (FITs) who will work alongside Ms. Miller. Becoming a Fellow is truly a journey in every sense of the word. Here are just some of the requirements to become a Fellow, which takes a minimum of six years: accrue a total of 250 hours of coursework, complete multiple practicums totaling 600 hours of 1:1 instruction, participate in trainings, conduct lesson observations and provide feedback to trainees, attend conferences, and do required readings.



Below is my interview with Ms. Miller about her OG journey.

Q: How did you first become involved in working with children with dyslexia?

I began my journey with language as a singer, long before my journey with dyslexia. In graduate school, I was very interested in language acquisition but did my assistantship working as a supervisor at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Reading Clinic. My first job offers were between a therapeutic preschool classroom and a job at a reading clinic that would have trained me to be a Wilson Language Therapist, but I was initially enamored by early childhood special education, specifically as it related to severe aggressive and self-injurious behavior.

After moving to Atlanta, and spending 3 years in the world of severe autism, I was burnt out both physically and emotionally. I applied to every school in Atlanta with a specialized focus. We are lucky in Atlanta to have many schools that specialize in serving students with learning differences. I landed at The Schenck School and fell in love with Orton Gillingham.

JULIE'S SUMMER READING CHALLENGE (CONT'D FROM PG. 1)

grade. This is based on decades of research about brain development, which indicates that the brain is really not ready to process reading until the age of six. Since Julie is now a rising first grader, and we don't know what school will look like in the fall, I decided to do a little experiment with her this summer.

Armed with the techniques I learned during Jenni's training back in June, I thought it would be cool to conduct a twofold experiment: 1) Since there is a chance that Julie might need to spend part of her first grade year learning online, I thought I could get her ahead of the game by teaching her how to use the various features on Zoom, and 2) If I was going to be using screens with her anyway, I wondered if maybe I could use what I learned from my June training to teach her how to read.

So now, we're Zooming from inside the same house, which is pretty funny - but she loves it! She feels like the center of attention because she has "school" when Haley does not, and she's learning so much! My hope is that by the time she starts first grade, she'll be able to read beginner books - and use Zoom - independently. Best case scenario, she won't need to use Zoom for the coming school year. But no matter what, she'll need to learn to read. I'll let you know how it goes, but so far, so good!

Q: Why did you decide to invest the time and commitment in training to become an Orton-Gillingham Fellow?

I loved the simplicity of it. Unlike anything I had trained in before, Orton was about knowledge NOT about stuff or a curriculum. The entire philosophy is that I carry the knowledge to prescriptively work with ANY struggling reader and I'm not reliant on a bag of materials or bound by any scope, sequence, or script. I'm not great with a script...

Q: What is the most challenging aspect of being an OG Fellow?

As a Fellow, I'm often asked to present to large groups or to train teachers who are not able to give this work the time in the classroom it really needs. It's frustrating to see those light bulb moments with teachers who are so passionate about helping children achieve and then seeing their frustration when they re-enter the classroom to be told that they only have 20 minutes for "phonics." Orton is SO much more than phonics, but an enormous disconnect still exists in many districts across our country.

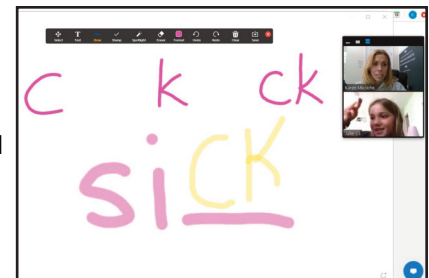
Q: Why did you decide to team up with Literacy Nassau?

I am motivated personally to work with organizations that understand exactly what Orton Gillingham is and how it works best. Literacy Nassau understands the value of delivering the approach with fidelity and recognizes the benefits of 1:1 instruction. They also understand the benefit of training that demands the inclusion of practicum. I am personally invested in cultivating relationships with organizations that work to provide OG to students who would otherwise not be able to access these services. Literacy Nassau checks all my dream training boxes.

Q: If there was just one nugget that you would want your OG trainees to take away from your trainings, what would it be?

This work begins in relationship with kids. The most important thing you can do is build a relationship. That means being deeply interested in who your students are AND a willingness to share parts of your life.

From there, the work becomes easier but it is tough. It requires hard work and years of practice and rehearsal before kids really feel like they've become master readers and spellers. It takes years before you as a practitioner feel like you've "gotten it." When you approach this as a relationship, the work becomes mutually rewarding. For my clients, our time together is often the most successful and enjoyable part of their week.



MY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

(submitted by Madayln Fernbach)

My name is Madalyn and I am a proud volunteer for Literacy Nassau. Before starting at Literacy Nassau in the summer of 2019, I was a college student, studying neuroscience at a small school in Boston. One of my most impactful experiences was my semester studying abroad in Denmark. During this experience, I explored several countries in Europe and during my travels, I realized just how difficult it can be to navigate a city without speaking the language. This experience inspired me to learn more about language.

In my last year of college, I started a neurolinguistics research study on the beneficial nature of multilingualism on aphasia (a speaking disability from a stroke). After becoming more fascinated with language in an academic setting, I was eager to learn more about language barriers in a social setting. When I graduated, I began to search for ways to serve my community by teaching English. Before I started a full-time job at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in NYC, I was fortunate to discover Literacy Nassau, an organization that assists ESL adults in my own neighborhood. It turned out to be the perfect mutual learning opportunity, as I got to help ESL students develop their English skills, while they taught me what it was like to live in the U.S. without English fluency.

In the fall of 2019, I taught the Level 3 Intermediate English Class in Hicksville. I loved sharing experiences and chatting about culture with my students, and it was incredible to see how much we had in common despite our different upbringings. My favorite classes were the ones where we discussed our favorite foods, friends and family, and pastimes; and although the words that we used to describe these things were sometimes spoken in different tongues, the joy and love we had for our respective passions transcended the language barriers. Towards the end of the 10 weeks, a few of my students asked if we could have a class about jobs and careers, so we reviewed interviewing, building an resume, practicing business etiquette,

and developing career-specific vocabulary. The highlight of my time as a tutor came when one of my students told the class that she was just offered a new job after successfully interviewing a few days before. This was one of many moments which showed me just how impactful teaching English can be.

This positive experience through Literacy Nassau inspired me to seek out professional development programs that use English as a vehicle to assisting others. This idea led me straight to the Fulbright Student Program, a national scholarship that promotes cultural exchange through international education. One of the opportunities that recent graduates could apply for was an English Teaching Assistantship, which placed scholars in countries where learning English is an integral part of a student's education. When I found a program in Poland that specifically taught English in science related content to Polish Master's students, I knew I had to apply.

I quickly learned just how difficult the application process was for a Fulbright Scholarship. Nevertheless, I was determined to give it my best shot. I was grateful when Kim Nau offered her support and helped me navigate the application process. I submitted my application in early winter and by January 2020, I was named a semi-finalist. In February, I had a virtual interview with the Polish Fulbright Committee. They asked me many questions, specifically, if I had any experience teaching adults and if I knew what it was like to converse about culture. I happily discussed Literacy Nassau and how content I felt every time I was doing this important work. A few months later, I received an email that I was selected to be of ten scholars from the U.S to be awarded the grant.

I know in my heart that my experience at Literacy Nassau was a major deciding factor in my being named a finalist for this prestigious award. I will be teaching English at the University of Science and Technology in Poland. I will also get the chance to lead language labs, attend lectures, and immerse myself in the local community. With everything going on in the world, cultural connections and international exchange are more important than ever. Thank you Literacy Nassau, I can't wait to represent all of the amazing work you do from abroad!

STAFF CHANGES

Unsurprisingly, the pandemic has led to a myriad of personal challenges for many families. Literacy Nassau was not exempt from the impact of personal challenges on our staffing. As a result, Cindy Cabrera and Kelly Siry are no longer with us. Kate is now working on our adult ESOL caseload, along with Jessica and Anne-Marie, and Jessica is spearheading our work with Next Chapter Book Clubs moving forward. It's a new fiscal year and a new school year, and although it's always hard to navigate changes, our team is re-energized and hopeful for the months to come.

If you are an ESOL tutor and have questions (or just want to say hello and wish her well!), you can reach Kate at kquijano@literacynassau.org. Similarly, if you are an NCBC or Jot it Down tutor and want to connect with Jessica, she can be reached at jdaprile@literacynassau.org.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

To offer additional opportunities for tutors and students to meet live, but with respect for social distancing, we are building an outdoor classroom in a remote section of our parking lot! If you would like to get involved, we need (handy) volunteers to come out and help us build planter boxes. The boxes will serve as half walls around the perimeter of our tented outdoor space. Also, once the planter boxes are all set up, we will need some volunteers to help us put together a small garden! (None of our staff members are particularly gifted in the garden, so we need the help of anyone with a green thumb!) If you have your own set of simple tools and would like to get involved, please contact Karen at kmicciche@literacynassau.org.



THANK YOU!



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**Special thanks to the Manhasset
Community Foundation's Greentree Good
Neighbor Fund for their grant of \$10,000.**

This grant will enable Literacy Nassau to continue processing N-400 applications for naturalization for residents in the town of North Hempstead.

We will also use the funding to support voter engagement activities and citizenship classes. Particularly in this election year, we are proud to be able to continue supporting our adult learners with these valuable resources.

Thank you, Greentree!



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