In Frank Manis’s lab, you are apt to find students poring over the latest MRI scan from skilled and unskilled readers, giving reading and language tests to children and adults, or playing “computer games” (actually visual and auditory perceptual experiments) with children. Frank has been curious about the sources of reading ability since his graduate school days, when he first encountered the mystery of dyslexic children, otherwise bright and motivated children who fail to progress normally in reading.

Frank has gone on to study reading development in bilingual children, perceptual and cognitive skills in dyslexic children, and the brain bases of skilled reading in children and adults. For example, Frank and colleagues Zhong-Lin Lu, neuroscience graduate student Allison Zumberge-Orechwa, and psychology graduate students Jason Goldman and Jennifer Bruno used fMRI techniques to study the functions of a small brain region located in the lower left hemisphere at the occipital/temporal lobe boundary. They found evidence that this area of the brain processes representations of whole word spelling in skilled readers, but that this region is not as efficient in processing word spellings among adults with current reading difficulties, despite the fact that they knew how to pronounce the words. Frank and his students are exploring other aspects of brain structure and brain function in dyslexic children and adults, including a study with Elaine Andersen, Zhong-Lin Lu and Zhisen Jiang, psychology graduate student, of Chinese character reading, and an investigation of brain activity in average and above average adult readers by Allison Zumberge-Orechwa. Undergraduate research assistants (Libby Donnell, Amanda Fildes and Belle Pui) will be assisting in this research, and conducting spin-off studies for their psychology honors theses.

Frank and his team are about to take their tests “on the road”. The team will conduct two studies in the schools. Rachel Beattie will examine whether the symbol-sound association learning problems of dyslexic children can be traced to problems in processing the prosodic contour of spoken words. Jason Goldman will investigate whether symbol-sound decoding and reading experience make separable contributions to the growth in the thickness of the language and reading cortex during middle childhood.

Frank Manis and his students enjoy communicating their findings to researchers, parents and school officials, because their studies may inform the next generation of reading interventions.

Frank enjoys using innovative pedagogical techniques to teach undergraduates about child development. He developed a program called “My Virtual Child” (published by Pearson) in which students act as a parent to a “virtual child” on an interactive website. The “children” have different personality and ability profiles, and respond to good or bad parenting in complex ways that send students searching through their textbook to uncover the reasons for their “children’s” behavior. In a spring semester course on “Children’s Learning”, Frank will ask students to tutor a real child in reading, writing and math through the JEP program, applying the knowledge they gain from research studies to “diagnose” the child’s learning needs, and analyze the child’s learning processes.

REMEmBER ! EVERY WEDNESDAY MORNING IS COFFEE AND PASTRY IN ROOM SGM 501

Some weeks we will have special guests for conversations about their career paths, their views of Psychology today, and their research projects of greatest personal interest.

DEC 10—HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SPECIAL GUESTS FOR THIS SEMESTER! YOU HAVE MADE OUR WEDNESDAY COFFEES MEMORABLE AND INFORMATIVE!
Elaine Andersen and the “Bring Me a Book” Foundation

Four years ago, I was approached by the Bring Me A Book (BMAB), a 501(c) non-profit literacy foundation with headquarters in Mountain View, CA, about the possibility of joining their board of directors. Coincidentally, I was contemplating devoting more energy to applying what I’ve learned about the bio-social bases of language and literacy to social issues in a way that would have an immediate impact on communities in California and nationally. It therefore took very little arm-twisting to convince me that BMAB offered an excellent opportunity for the type of ‘marriage’ of theory and practice that I was looking for. At the time BMAB was focused mainly in the San Francisco Bay Area.

During the next three years, as word got out of the success of our programs, opportunities arrived on our doorstep from numerous sources near and far. BMAB now has well-established regional offices in San Joaquin County; Sacramento County; Marin County, and Oakland. We serve over 450,000 children and parents at over 1,400 sites in California, 14 states, and 7 countries, the latter through partnerships with the Chen Yet Sen Foundation (see http://www.bringmeabook.org.hk/ for more about our Hong Kong operations), Hands on Shanghai, Proyectos Itzaes, Save the Children, Books for Africa, Esperanza Juventil, and Boys and Girls Hope. While these activities were exciting and rewarding, some of us kept saying to ourselves some version of ‘charity begins at home’, and wondering why we were expanding so rapidly across the country and the world, when so much needed to be done in California. And that is when the idea of a USC-BMAB partnership started taking shape.

With encouragement from our chair, Mary Gatz, from the director of the USC Center for Urban Youth, Gayla Margolin, from other Psychology department faculty, and from various deans in the College, we decided to dramatically expand our programs in Los Angeles, with USC faculty and students playing a central role.

To support our efforts in Los Angeles, we have received a two-year grant from the California Community Foundation (CCF) to support a regional office here and to carry out a two-year longitudinal and cross-sectional study of the impact of Bring Me A Book Foundation’s programs in increasing school readiness and pre-literacy skills of underserved preschool and kindergarten students in the Los Angeles Unified School District, beginning with the areas surrounding USC.

With additional support from Cisco and from the Norris Foundation, we will begin in January to establish our programs (both our high-quality Bookcase Libraries and our ‘First Teachers’ workshops) in underserved local schools. Our workshops, facilitated by qualified trainers who conduct sessions in Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and English, engage and educate parents, childcare providers and teachers on the critical importance of reading aloud activities with children. The training even has a ‘cognitive neuroscience, neural network’ component that educates caregivers on how the activities we encourage will impact their child’s brain development.

We are eager to involve USC students, faculty, and staff in our efforts. For more information, contact me at eanderse@usc.edu or visit: http://www.bringmeabook.org/

Have You Read Anything Good Lately?


Mary Helen Immordino-Yang was interviewed by The Washington Diplomat for a story entitled “Arts Smart: Educators Look at Cognitive Benefits of Arts Programs”.

http://www.washdiplomat.com/November%202008/c1_11_08.html

She was also quoted in The National, the English language newspaper of Abu Dhabi, UAE, for a story entitled, “Mirror, mirror, in the brain,” http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081105/FRONTIERS/422377182/1036

Errata: from left to right, Dr. Liping Wang, Yue Leng, Dr. Zhonglin Lu, Minmin Cheng, Haisian Wang
UPCOMING EVENTS

DECEMBER 10 Poster Day
Pizza and Holiday Party
1:30 pm—3:00 pm

The Halls will be decked with poster presentations by our 3rd year Graduate Students.

You are invited to view the poster presentations on SGM 9th floor, to meet the students and ask them questions regarding their research and to enjoy pizza and socialize with your psychology colleagues.

DECEMBER 16
12:30—1:30 pm—HNB 100
Neuroscience Seminar Series
presents
Dr. Irwin Waldman, Emory University
"Dopamine Genes and Children’s Disruptive Behavior Disorders"

EMILY FINE
Candidate for Ph.D. in Psychology
will be defending her dissertation

"Deconstructing the Psychological Components of Emotional Decision Making and their Relation to the Suicide Continuum"

Thursday, December 11
10:00 am
SGM 514

Did You Know?

- Gayla Margolin and The Center for Urban Youth was recently featured in an article in the USC magazine. View the article at http://www.usc.edu/uscnews/stories/15970.html

- The New School Psychology Bulletin, a graduate-student-centered journal located at www.nspb.net is seeking submissions in psychological research from psychology graduate students. The articles may cover experiments in all branches of psychology, clinical case studies, literature reviews, or commentary on the field. If you would like to look at a copy, Maria has one at her desk.

- Lewina Lee (Advisor Carol Prescott) has received the Rockwell Dennis Hunt Scholastic Award. The awards ceremony will take place on April 14, 2009. This award is for USC graduate student whose undergraduate degree is from USC, and whose qualities exemplify USC’s mission including the pursuit of knowledge, education and personal service.

Psychology Department Wednesday Morning Coffee

"Besides the tasty free food and coffee (which no grad students in their right mind should turn down), there are lots of intangible benefits to going to Wednesday coffee. I’ve run into people I hadn't seen in ages, and met a wonderful array of new people. And though at first glance most of the research being discussed had no obvious bearing on my work, every coffee has contributed something to my life, from making me aware of a pre-existing subject population perfect for a project my supervisor had planned, to finding out about where the good restaurants are in Culver City, to getting a feel for how unfamiliar types of research are performed. So while it takes some effort to actually be awake enough on Wednesday mornings to get to campus by 9:30 from Pasadena, it's definitely been worth it, and has been a great way for me to learn more about my department and broader field."

~Andrea McColl, first year graduate student~

Dr. John Cacioppo, Wednesday Coffee