A Word From Our New Math Director...

By: Jessica Papia, Math Director

Expert library card swiper. Personable, humorous waitress. Bookstore shelf restocker. These were the jobs that I took on, as a college student with a lot of bills to pay and English papers to write. I focused on earning as much spending money as possible, while dedicating as little of my precious “spare” time as I could manage.

The Readers and Coordinators at ReadersPLUS don’t view their employment in that same light.

They are committed to helping children acquire the skills that they need to be successful and – more importantly – see themselves as intelligent, empowered people. This dedication is evident in the people whom I have met since I started this position: Readers who create lesson plans with cookies and girlfriend word problems or who ask to work more sessions with a student because they know how important it is to help every child learn; Coordinators who come in between classes to talk about how they’ve organized their Readers’ Room or who email me on the weekend to brag about their House Cup Points; and staff members who devote their time to bringing in outside speakers for the students or who focus on creative ways to show their Readers that they are supported and appreciated.

Before I returned to school to earn my Masters in Public Policy, I taught on the East Coast. I worried about leaving my students and about who would take my place in the classroom. It is a relief and an inspiration to work with the people who are the next generation of educators, innovators, and volunteers. At ReadersPLUS, I have seen people transform a job into a public service, and reach their students with diverse lessons based on student interest and learning style, informed by data, and shaped by passion.

It’s the passion, by the way, that makes everything else work.
All is quiet at the JEP House, and it may look as though Joint Educational Project programs are not happening this semester. But it is quite the contrary – there is a LOT happening this fall, just not at the house. JEP’s recent move to the LOT for renovations has not swayed USC ReadersPlus in its missions to expand its reach and design new programs. This fall, our USC ReadersPlus Family of Schools served has grown from five to seven with the addition of Alexander Science Center and John Mack Elementary. The expansion to these new schools was made possible by a partnership with another USC program, the Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI). NAI is a flagship program at USC which, like USC ReadersPlus, is funded in part through the university’s Good Neighbors’ Campaign and designed to prepare students from our neighborhood schools for admission to USC or other institutions of higher education. It is a rigorous six year program (7th through 12th grades) which prepares students for college success and lifelong learning. NAI scholars who complete the program and meet USC’s competitive admission requirements are awarded with a full 4.5-year financial package.

Last spring, NAI Executive Director, Kim Thomas-Barrios, and I collaborated on a proposal to University Neighborhood Outreach fund for USC ReadersPlus II – what we like to call “Community Tutors”. With this grant, incoming NAI scholars are provided an immediate work-study job tutoring children in some of the very schools from which they have matriculated. These extra students have allowed us to finally reach out to our two new school partners and assist even more children struggling in the areas of reading and math.

In addition to the new schools and the partnership with NAI, first through third grade students are meeting real scientists in some of our after school programs through our new program component … WonderKids! Over the past few months, marine biologists, geneticists, chemists and environmental scientists have visited Vermont, Weemes, 32nd Street and Foshay. The WonderKids curriculum, which introduces children to the wide range of occupations in the sciences through hands-on activities and experiments – is introduced to after school programs twice each week by our USC ReadersPlus tutors. After three days of study and activity around each particular field of science, the culminating lesson introduces a USC faculty or staff member who visits the school as a guest speaker to engage and inspire students. Students at Vermont learned about changing states of matter while they made their own ice cream in cans. While enjoying the result of his experiment Oscar Escobedo, a third grader from Vermont, gave the program is approval as he declared, “Best day ever!”

We look forward to more of these “best days” as we move forward into the new semester with more science, more students, and the promise of a new and improved JEP house next fall.
A “Lot” of Change for JEP
By: Elizabeth Inglese, Literacy Director

Since the Joint Educational Project has been around, the JEP House has been our home, our emblem, our identity. Generations of USC students have served proudly in the cramped though cozy halls of that house but years of wear and tear left their mark. We were busting at the seams to contain our ever-expanding program so we were ecstatic at the news that our house would receive a full make-over. *This is a great thing,* I told myself. *The plans for our new JEP house include a basement level, an outdoor patio, and the space we need to be our most productive. This is a great thing,* I repeated with waning enthusiasm. I was excited for the renovation, but not for our relocation.

I was not alone in dreadful anticipation of our move from the cutest house on campus to the former food-court turned rows of cubicles- The Lot. Though we all knew the house needed some TLC, we didn’t want to give it up for the estimated nine months it would take to get it. The JEP staff sniffled our goodbyes and with heavy hearts made our way to that big top in the parking lot. *Like a termite tent,* I grumbled, wheeling my files over. I was expecting the worst but I was ready to persevere. *We are JEP,* I told myself, *and we will thrive in our temporary home.*

Pushing through the doors that first day, I did not see a monochromatic chain of zombie-like JEP students scrunched tightly in cubicles. I saw Tammy Anderson and Tina Kongazny, Executive Director and Associate Director of JEP, smiling at a welcome table. They pointed me to my cubicle. “This whole thing is mine?” I asked. The space is bigger than my college dorm. The happy chatter of PAs sounded just as it had filtering out from the ATR. Beside me, ReadersPLUS Co-Director, Jesse Papia settled herself in. We discussed our week’s agenda, commiserated over papers due, and sat down to our computers to work. Everything felt familiar. “I don’t want to jinx this,” I said, “but this isn’t so bad.”

It has been two months now and if you ask us, we’ll say *JEP House? What JEP House?* Well, no, we won’t. We miss the warmth of our little home and we are excited to reclaim it, but I can say for certain, we do not hate The Lot. Our new space has been good to us. We have room to work, friendly neighbors, even a vinyl version of skylights. But most importantly, we have each other, the JEP family, who make any place- even The Lot- a home.

Please Share With Your Friends...
Like working with children? Want to get involved in our neighborhood school? Apply to USC ReadersPlus and become a Reading or Math Mentor.

It'll be the best job you ever had!

$8.50/hour. Work Study Preferred.

Limited positions for students without work-study.

THE LOT (213-740-1834)
Applications due January 20th.

Visit: http://dornsife.usc.edu/readersplus to download an application and learn more.
WonderKids At 32nd Street

By: Briana Neveras, Assistant Coordinator

The students at 32nd Street are more than excited about the new WonderKids program that has been implemented during afterschool. When asked to share her opinion of WonderKids, one of our first grade students, Karol, told us proudly, “I love science now!” Recently, our students learned about environmental scientists and marine biologists, and were able to do fun activities like drawing their own ecosystems and feeling (very realistic) “whale blubber.” We look forward to exploring even more professions in the weeks to come!

Guest speaker, David Needham, talking about Marine Biology.

Student Spotlight in the After-School Program: Mari Wilson

By: Miles du Mosch, Coordinator

Mari Wilson may be new to the Readers’ After-School Program, but she behaves like she’s been around for years. She is always extremely well-behaved and goes above and beyond expectations during the enrichment activities. When asked about Mari, the Readers had nothing but good things to say. “She has a great, positive attitude,” said Reader Briana Neveras.

“She sets an example for the rest of the kids,” commented Reader Paola Garcia.

There is no doubt that Mari is one of the best behaved students in the program. Her patience, intelligence, cooperation, and positivity have made her a shining star in the After-School Program at 32nd Street.

Tutor, Shelly Nakamura, with a face-painted Mari Wilson.

From NAI to ReadersPlus

By: Meris Hernandez, Tutor, NAI Scholar

As I was getting ready to leave the caring hands of the Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI), which I have been a part of for the last six years, and entering USC, NAI gave me one last parting gift: a job application. The job application was for USC’s Readers Plus Program, a program in alliance with the JEP House that I had become familiar with through its conjunction with NAI. I turned in the application and received the job with 32nd Street School.

Luckily, I had previously met someone that works there: Mrs. Lopez. She came to talk to me months before, when she found out I was an NAI scholar and also going to USC, and she has been a wonderful and great help. I love working with this program and assisting children in a fundamental stage. I am helping two 5th graders, one 3rd grader, and one 2nd grader to improve their reading skills, and so far it has been really great.

Meris Hernandez with 32nd Street student, Jenevy Uraga.
Student Spotlight: Geoffrey Perez

By: Tracy Yen, Tutor

Geoffrey Perez one of the most enthusiastic students in our after school program and his energy is contagious. He always has a smile on his face. He is very respectful towards the students as well as the Readers and eagerly completes all of the activities with enthusiasm. Geoffrey’s excitement for the program can be seen at the beginning of afterschool every day when he runs up to the Readers so he can be first in line (and even when he isn’t, it doesn’t faze him at all).

“I've been a pleasure...
helping the school that basically raised me.”
-Ricardo Portillo

Math Fun With Tracy Yen

By: Gina Hakim, Coordinator

Tracy Yen is a very committed and hard-working tutor. She is completely devoted to her students during her one-on-one sessions and in after school, she not only helps the students with their homework and activities but makes it enjoyable and enriching for them. As a math tutor, Tracy has incorporated multiplication bingo in her one-on-one sessions in order to create math-oriented games and to engage the student in a more hands-on and active way.

NAI Student Returns To Foshay

By: Ricardo Portillo, Tutor

I've been attending Foshay Learning Center since fifth grade and graduated not too long ago. It's been a pleasure going back and helping the school that basically raised me. Although I did not attend from the beginning of elementary school, I was still close to many of the teachers there, and to see me coming back brings joy to them. I have a deeper connection with the faculty in general because I attended Foshay previously and I feel comfortable returning. The school and the teachers greeted me with open arms.
The faculty at John Mack, along with the students, were ecstatic to get started with the USC Readers program. Ms. Grady, the principal, received the program with open arms. We decided to shape the program to meet the needs of the school, and in this case, the greatest need lies in the 3rd graders.

At first, we were a little hesitant to limit our program to only 3rd graders but now we realize that this is how we can make the greatest impact.

Every Mack Reader accepted the challenge and now we are well on our way to helping all these 3rd graders reach their full potential.

Mack, A New Home For ReadersPlus
By: Dimiana Saad, Coordinator

The ReadersPlus area at Mack Elementary.

Parents Appreciate After School Program
By: Hyungju Kim

Working for an after school program at John W. Mack Elementary School, I have had the opportunity to directly witness the effects of the programs on the lives of the students and their families.

I had a few, but very interesting conversations with the students' parents, and it felt very rewarding. The parents told me how helpful the after school program has been for their students, especially since they are not able to help them with homework at home.

It was amazing to see parents taking an active interest in the well-being of their students, and it deeply encouraged me to become a more patient and understanding USC Reader.

Tutor Recognition: Ali Walensky
By: Dimiana Saad, Coordinator

Ali Walensky deserves recognition for her contributions to Mack. I have never seen someone with such enthusiasm, passion and brilliant ideas.

I accredit the vast improvement in ASP to her efforts. She came up with our brilliant cheer, “Hey Mack! Holla Back!”

which has become an effective way to get the kids to quiet down.

Ali has also started a new tradition that the kids love in ASP, Math Wars, where they get to be in competition with one another to see who has memorized their times tables.

Overall, I believe that the development of Mack would suffer without the presence of Ali and I am more than grateful that she is part of my staff.

Mack coordinator, Dimiana Saad, in costume with student Tomás San Lorenzo.
Lesson Plan Highlight
By: Emily Brooke, Coordinator

This semester has brought a lot of math tutoring into the Norwood classroom, especially with our kindergartners and first graders!

Senior math mentor Maggie Ching has been helping Brigette Portillo build the basis of all her math learning through numbers this semester. To help her kinesthetic learner recognize the number and its value, Maggie created a *Hello Kitty* chart. On the left side, they together learned all the numbers 1-10, and then they cut out Hello Kitty shapes and next to each number glued down the appropriate number.

Now whenever they count, Brigette has multiple representations of her numbers and a key to refer back to. Watching Brigette excitedly color in her *Hello Kitties* and confidently count her way to ten is a joy to hear in the classroom!

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Danielle Starr: Tutor of the Semester
By: Emily Brooke, Coordinator

This semester, we have watched our new math mentor Danielle truly blossom as a tutor! Danielle came in during her first semester here at USC and has made a great impact with her students.

From coming up with lesson plans that involve flowers, to getting her students to actively engage with their math, we are proud of all that Danielle has done! Her students do matching games, counting, drawing and everything possible to really bolster their math skills.

We are excited to see Danielle grow even more as a tutor and continue to “wow” us with creative lesson plans that leave her students with big smiles across their faces!

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Most Improved Student: Dayana Justo
By: Esther Mojica, Assistant Coordinator

Dayana Justo is a second grader at Norwood. From the first day of her one-on-one she has not only showed enthusiasm, but also pride in being part of the program. Because Dayana has an older sibling who was also part of the program, she is very grateful that now she gets to be a part of it too.

When she first began her sessions, Dayana was struggling in identifying first grade dolch words. With the use of flash cards, white boards, and memory games she has not only mastered first grade dolch words, but second grade as well!

Her willingness and desire to learn has helped her with this skill and will continue to throughout her educational career.

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Hello Kitty Lesson Plan
**Science Center**

**Tutors Getting Creative**  
By: Anne-Marie White, Coordinator

As a new site we have limited resources, but because of this it has encouraged our tutors to get creative with lesson plans.

Ethan has brought in sugar wafers, toothpicks, and cheerios to add to our workspace. Evelyn devised an exciting competition amongst her students where they are all collecting stickers for various achievements during tutoring sessions. Lexine made some cutouts to work on character traits for “Kungfu Panda,”

and Meghan has been researching lesson plans online to match some of the books we have in our library, like “Amelia Bedelia.”

Checkers has become the most exciting game for the third graders and is used to assess mastery of vocabulary, multiplication tables and story comprehension.

**Our Workspace at Science Center**  
By: Anne-Marie White, Coordinator

Since we have a small staff of five, we work exclusively with third grade. It has been really great getting to form strong relationships with the third grade teachers. Also since we have been placed in the third grade laboratory we are right in the middle of the four classrooms, and have direct access to two of them.

The school has been very generous in giving us a beautiful and spacious place to work in. We have two large cabinets to store our slowly growing library and supplies. Each tutor also has their own cubby to keep their binder, personal supplies and any on-going lesson plan materials that they are using. It has been really great having a community space where readers can work together and collaborate, but also have enough personal space to store materials and large tables for tutoring sessions to take place without being on top of each other.

Working at SciCen is just a pleasure because of the people, the students, and the facilities!
Returning to Vermont
By: Veronica Estrada, Tutor, NAI Scholar

It feels surreal to see my class photo of 2002 hanging on the wall of the main building and running into my K-2nd grade teachers as I am picking up my students to tutor them.

Besides having gone to the same school myself for elementary school, I hold a special connection with them because we share similar backgrounds, struggles, and community. It is a rewarding experience to tutor and mentor while at the same time serving as a role model demonstrating that anyone can go to USC if you work really hard for it.

It feels great to give back to the very own community that raised me.

Fun With Chemistry
By: Vivian Breckenridge, Assistant Coordinator

WonderKids received the highest form of compliment when Oscar E. declared, “This is the best day ever!”

The day’s activity, ice cream making, were bound to be enjoyable, but those words coming from such a rough-n-tumble third grader convinced us that the Wonder Kids chemistry unit was a fabulous success.

When we announced that we would be doing an experiment to turn solids and liquids into ice cream, the field of chemistry became in their minds the best kind of science.

Every group got an can full of ice and salt, in which they inserted the plastic bags containing their ice cream mixtures. For 15 minutes the whole classroom was filled with the sounds of giggling, yelling, splashing and shaking as the kids used all of the energy they had to shake their cream and sugar into a solid desert.

At the end we started a countdown, with all of the kids joining in, screaming the numbers at the top of their lungs as if it was New Year’s Eve, until we reached “1” and they could stop shaking and enjoy the treat they’d made.

And so we confirmed that the way to a kid’s heart (and mind apparently) is through ice cream.

Lesson Plan Creativity
By: Paige Gartland, Coordinator

Tutors at Vermont Elementary are full of creativity and new ideas for lesson plans. We have many resources for our tutors available on site, including games and activities tutors have created over the years.

This supply has continued to grow this year, with new games such as a Toy Story reading game, and a USC Readers Monopoly.

As a coordinator, I am always amazed at the dedication our tutors have to their students and the effort they put into their lessons. The games and activities have proven successful with the students and allow them to learn while also having fun.
We embarked on our fall semester at Weemes Elementary School by welcoming one of our newest Readers Paola Casilla. Being a freshman at USC can be nerve racking, but Paola believes that the ReadersPlus program will leave her with an unforgettable college experience.

Throughout the semester, Paola has proven to be an amazing Reader who cares very much about the academic achievements of her students. In attempting to create lesson plans that are both engaging and effective, Paola has shown her resourcefulness by utilizing materials that are available at the school site. When working with her 3rd grade student Jada Shaw, Paola asks her student to “shop” at a made-up store by using plastic coins to help the student with differentiating coins and value.

We are so glad to be having Paola as a part of our Weemes family, and we sincerely appreciate her commitment to the program and her dedication to the students. Fight on!

Student Success
By: Amanda Johnson, Tutor

My student, Jasmin Trujillo, has shown exceptional growth this semester. I have been working with her on improving her math skills. Jasmin started the semester with only basic knowledge of how to add and subtract single-digit numbers.

Through the course of the semester, however, she has grown to be able to add and subtract double-digit numbers. She now knows how to borrow and carry into the other place values, and has demonstrated the ability to consistently correctly answer such problems.

As her tutor, I am inspired by Jasmin's progress and impressed by her efforts. The dedication and perseverance she applies to her math problems makes me want to work harder both as her tutor and as a student.

When asked about her own progress, Jasmin had only one thing to say: “I like learning how to do math. It makes me feel smart and makes my mom proud of me.”
Our Fall 2011 Team of Coordinators

32nd Street School
Coordinator: Miles du Mosch
Assistant Coordinator: Briana Neveras

Foshay Elementary
Coordinator: Gina Hakim
Assistant Coordinator: Drew Matsuda

John W. Mack Elementary
Coordinator: Dimiana Saad

Norwood Elementary
Coordinator: Emily Brooke
Assistant Coordinator: Esther Mojica

Alexander Science Center
Coordinator: Anne-Marie White

Vermont Elementary
Coordinator: Paige Gartland
Assistant Coordinator: Vivian Breckenridge

Weemes Elementary
Coordinator: A’aron Heard
Assistant Coordinator: Julie Gu

The Office Staff

Tina Koneazny
JEJP Associate Director, Administration and Educational Outreach

Elizabeth Inglese
Literacy Director

Jessica Papia
Math Director

Natasha Snegova
Central Site Coordinator
About Us...

USC ReadersPlus is an “America Reads/America Counts” literacy and math tutoring program under the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences.

The program is administered by the Joint Educational Project and funded in part through the Good Neighbor’s Campaign. Our mentors work with seven of the “Family of Schools” surrounding USC.

How We Started...

In 1997, President Clinton launched legislation that would provide additional work-study money to colleges and universities with the condition that a large portion of it go to one-on-one literacy programs for children grades K-6. The JEP version of America Reads was the first in the nation to begin working under these guidelines, launching on May 19, 1997. In May of 1999, America Counts was added to include math education and it was at this time that the USC Readers program name was changed to USC ReadersPlus.