A SEMESTER OF GROWTH AND CONNECTION

Tina Koneazny, JEP Associate Director

Over the past few years, JEP has been fortunate to have Beth Levinson as a valuable addition to our professional staff. Prior to JEP, Beth was an Educational Developer at McMaster University in Canada. Before McMaster, she was a K-12 educator in the US, where she supported her students’ learning through inquiry. Beth graduated from the University of California, San Diego with a BA in Political Science and received her master’s degree in education from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Given her experience in education and curriculum development, Beth has been helping to guide and support our ReadersPLUS leadership team in rethinking and revamping our tutor training curriculum and development of a new lesson plan form that will more effectively, and readily, allow us to measure student progress and outcomes. Beth worked jointly with Abbie Hitzemann, a Rossier PhD degree recipient May 2023, on both efforts that were inspired by the great need to consider some of the new challenges and educators — and tutors! — are currently facing due to the devastating academic impacts and student learning loss that resulted from the COVID pandemic.

I am thrilled to have Beth working alongside me to support our tutors and peer leaders as we all strive to continue learning and growing in our work serving our partner schools, teachers, and K-5 students. You will get to know Beth and her work better later in this newsletter edition, as she shares more about some of the changes she introduced to the program this semester.
It feels comforting to reflect upon the fact that all four years of my undergraduate experience were shaped by my time at JEP ReadersPLUS both as a tutor and coordinator at the Norwood site. Go Polar Bears! Being part of the Readers family, regardless of your role, means being welcomed by a tight-knit community on USC’s sprawling campus where service work is marked by compassion and humility. The people I worked with over the years, whether within the JEP house or at the school, were truly some of the most empathetic and devoted people I have ever met. It always felt like a safe and nurturing space and those dynamics directly informed the close connections forged between tutors and all of the incredible students we were privileged enough to work with. I will always remember the kids I got to see develop grade after grade.

What makes it such an impactful experience is that, whether you’re a student receiving tutoring or a program director, you have a voice within Readers; there’s a space for your authentic self to shine. Having been a part of the program will continuously encourage me to seek out work and community spaces that are just as heart-felt.

My time at Readers solidified my love of mentoring and making meaningful connections with youth. After graduating, I moved off-grid onto a 28-acre farm on Kauai. Here, there is a nature-based school program where I am one of the teachers. I take the older home-schooled kids on enrichment days around the island and engage in Montessori-centered learning on the farm with the preschool-aged group. It has been a wonderful place to land, but it’s definitely a lot more muddy and mosquito-filled than DTLA!

Sending my love to all ReadersPLUS folks past present and future,

Nisey Berry
In the spirited realm of ReadersPLUS, our fall semester was not only marked by academic enrichment but also by the exciting House Cup competition. Each site, comprising our different elementary schools, engaged in friendly rivalry, earning points through commendable accomplishments and going above and beyond in their dedication to the program. The competition was fierce, with several intense toss-ups keeping the excitement levels high throughout the semester. After a gripping and hard-fought battle, it is our pleasure to announce that Norwood emerged victorious, claiming the House Cup after a journey filled with teamwork, determination, and a commitment to excellence. Congratulations to all participating teams for making this year's House Cup one to remember!
Farewell and Thank you

Carla Collier -- tutor, coordinator, math director
ReadersPlus ALL STAR!

Carla will be graduating this semester with a Bachelor of Science in Human Biology and Master of Science in Stem Cell Biology, after having devoted 8 semesters working with JEP and the ReadersPlus program -- beginning as tutor and working all the way up to Math Director. Carla has always been a tremendously helpful and caring part of the ReadersPlus team, and she will be greatly missed! We wish you all the best!

Drawn from end of semester evaluations from tutors and peer leaders, words of gratitude and appreciation for Carla below:

“Carla always demonstrated active listening when voicing concerns and questions. She always empathized with coordinators and tutors about what they were experiencing. She was very active in communication and always responded quickly.”

“Carla is a great role model and I appreciate how she took the time to get to know me (i.e. what I’m studying, as well as bonding over our struggles with the STEM courses we had to take for our majors). “

“Carla was always very easy to interact with. She always created a safe space when you were talking to her.”
We have implemented a new template for lesson planning that is strongly aligned with the California Common Core Standards, designed to better address the learning loss in fundamental reading and math skills of elementary students due to the COVID related school closures and online instruction. Post-pandemic, students all over the world have returned to their classrooms with significant learning deficit. However, students in priority neighborhoods are showing an even deeper learning deficit and these are the students with whom ReadersPlus tutors engage. This new lesson plan template supports tutors developing standards based lessons that are individualized to the needs of their students.

The lesson plan template requires tutors to identify a Common Core Standard that will provide a framework for the lesson. The first portion of the lesson is a Warm Up which introduces the lesson topic and allows tutors to take a very informal assessment of prior knowledge of their student. The second portion of the lesson is a Fun Learning Activity. We don’t want tutoring sessions to be boring! Instead, we encourage tutors to be creative and develop engaging learning experiences for their students that include hands-on learning. During the Fun Learning Activity, students “practice” the standard. For example, if the tutor is working on multiplying up to 10, the fun learning activity focuses on interesting and hands on ways to practice multiplying up to 10. Tutors are encouraged to use manipulatives and strategies that invite their student to actively participate in the activities. Tutors can play a game with the student, or work on the activity with the student. Elementary students learn best when their hands and brains are on! This also helps the tutor to stay focused on what the lesson should be covering.

The last portion of the template is the Post Assessment. This is NOT a formal test!! This can be another round of a game. The difference between the Post Assessment and the Learning Activity is that the student does the assessment independently. Tutors will determine if the student can do the standard with at least an 80% accuracy before moving on to another standard.

Tutors are asked to report on the progress that their student is making after each tutoring session. We need this information for a few reasons. One is to make sure that our approach is effective. Another is for the tutor to know whether they need to continue to work on the same standard or move on. We are not in a race! Tutors can take as long as they need on a standard. Our objective is to see growth among the student with whom we engage. It is a marathon, not a sprint!
Every week, our tutors create a personalized lesson plan based on their students interests and learning goals. Tutors are encouraged to make use of manipulatives, create out-of-the-box learning activities, and have fun during their sessions while still practicing and enhancing reading and math skills.

Best Lesson Plan winners this semester were Sophia Da Costa from Weemes and Maximus Allen from Mack!

**Literacy**

**Lesson Plan Template**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Tutor</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Common Core Standard**
- Demonstrate ability to identify the main idea of a text using key details; summarize the text.
  - Develop students' ability to identify the main idea of a text
  - Develop students' ability to explain how key details support the main idea of a text. (Students learn to summarize the text effectively, demonstrating comprehension and the ability to extract essential information).
- Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
- Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

**Fun Learning Activity**
- Introduce the lesson topic
  - Determine if your student has the necessary prior knowledge
  - Warm Up should be fun and engaging.

**Post Assessment**
- Assess whether the student can do the skill independently and with accuracy (70%-80%)

**Math**

**Lesson Plan Template - MATH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Tutor</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Common Core Standard**
- Analyze and interpret data using bar graphs, line plots, and frequency tables.
  - Create and interpret bar graphs, line plots, and frequency tables.
  - Identify and compare measures of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode.
  - Use data to solve real-world problems.

**Fun Learning Activity**
- Introduce the lesson topic
  - Determine if your student has the necessary prior knowledge
  - Warm Up should be fun and engaging. This should take about 5-10 minutes.

**Post Assessment**
- Assess whether the student can do the skill independently and with at least 70% accuracy

**Materials needed for lesson:**
- Dinner at the Panda Palace
- Paper and markers
- Prepared bar chart with missing x-axis labels

**Materials needed for lesson:**
- Construction Paper
- Strips of paper (pre-labeled)
- Glue
Thank you to the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation for their donation to ReadersPLUS!

The generous donation of books, pencils, pencil sharpeners, crayons, toothbrushes and toothpaste from the Foundation created lovely holiday gifts for tutors to present to their students to wrap up the semester, in celebration of both their successes and the season. We are grateful for our beautiful partnership.
This semester, our Weemes team worked hard to implement Little Yoginis at Weemes after school program. Little Yoginis aims to teach kids yoga poses and practice mindfulness as they unwind from a day at school. Each session, the Yogis pick a mindfulness-related book to introduce the theme, and then transition into practicing yoga, which the kids are always enthusiastic to try. Pictured above are is a Little Yoginis session at Weemes ASP.

Stellar Paperwork

Each week, tutors and ACs complete paperwork, largely focused on their experiences tutoring and reflecting on the community. One of the creative projects assigned this semester was the Site Newspaper, which House Cup points were awarded to the winner. Below we showcase select pages from 32nd Street’s winning submission.