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Magazine



A LAUREATE'S LEGACY

Alumnus James Buchanan's vision for education—and his Nobel Prize medal—is displayed proudly at MTSU

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Over 100 Participants Learn New Languages by Telling Stories

Teens and adults of all ages were able to jumpstart their understanding of new languages this summer during the University's 11th annual Summer Language Institute.

Led by Dr. Shelley Thomas, an associate professor of foreign languages and literatures and founder of MTSU's Center for Accelerated Language Acquisition (CALA), students received weeklong courses in Arabic, Spanish, and French taught

successfully tested out of two to three semesters of Spanish. MTSU employee Tammie Dye, a grandmother who went to South America after the classes, said about her experience, "I am at a loss for words to express how much I enjoyed the class and how pleased I am with the results. I am still amazed that I can understand so much Spanish!"

"People want language learning to be fun, stress-free, and hands-on,

out. We use the simple vocabulary they learn through movement to create a story together as students are acting it out," said Thomas. "We don't use any words that they don't actually experience in class, so that it goes into long-term memory. We've had people take level one and come back a year later for level two, and they say they are able to pick right back up where they left off. We start reading a simple novel on the fifth

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by using intensive, brain-friendly language acquisition methods: TPR (Total Physical Response) and TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling).

Beginning language learners were able to grasp and use new vocabulary in five days, thanks to methods designed to teach students a second language the same way they learned their first—learning new vocabulary through movement and storytelling.

Participants with no previous Spanish training took placement tests after the classes in June and



Language institute participants (L-R) Eddie Phillips, Steven Neusse, and Maya Campbell work on a group project day, and when students realize they are understanding comfortably, they are amazed."

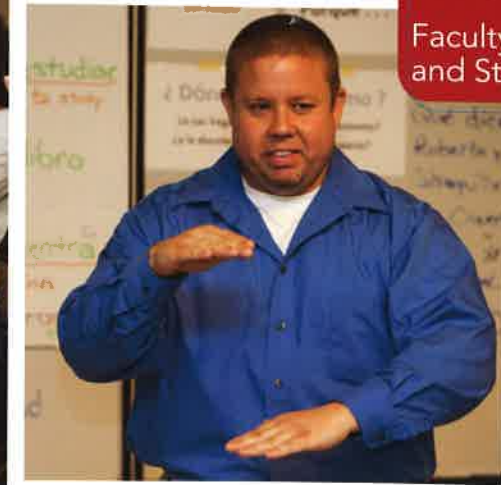
and that's what our classes are," said Thomas. In traditional classes, students might be asked to memorize large vocabulary lists and repeat verb charts. Thomas said she found research on how movement affects learning, and it motivated her to change how she taught. In CALA classes, there's direct experience with new vocabulary first, then personal interaction and games to the experience, and finally a question/answer time to ask about the language.

"We take about 200–300 words that students can touch, see, and act

Thomas says that CALA's five-day immersion classes are the result of a Special Projects Grant she was awarded in 2003. Blaine Ray, inventor of TPRStorytelling, published test results from that summer in the fourth edition of *Fluency through TPR-Storytelling*. Since 2003, CALA has gained international recognition, and Thomas has been invited to



Dr. Thomas leads a June CALA Summer Language Institute class



CALA Summer Language Institute spanish teacher Brian Roberts

Faculty and Staff

coordinate numerous language classes and teacher workshops at various locations in Tennessee and also in India. She has been invited to give keynotes and present workshops at international, national, and regional conferences. At MTSU, she has been providing 12 hours of training for Chinese teachers from the Central South University of Forestry and Technology, hosted by MTSU's Confucius Institute.

CALA has become a resource that provides volunteer teachers, free materials, and workshops to the Murfreesboro Hispanic Family Center and Rutherford County and Murfreesboro City School ESL teachers.

The recommendation of Adam Emerson, a Fulbright scholar to Russia who participated in CALA Summer Language Institute 2012, convinced Laura Clippard, coordinator for the Undergraduate Fellowships Office, to push CALA training for Fulbright recipients who will be teaching English abroad. Says Emerson, "I acquired not only an extensive French vocabulary but also an understanding

of the ways in which we acquire language, best practices for ensuring my students' comprehension of important concepts, and effective classroom management techniques."

Brian Roberts and Ahmad Jeddeeni taught this summer's Spanish and Arabic classes, respectively. Roberts graduated from MTSU with degrees in psychology, philosophy, and Spanish and later earned an M.A. in teaching foreign languages after living and traveling in Spain and France. He has worked as a language specialist for the Tennessee Center for Child Welfare, teaching Spanish to employees of the Department of Children's Services throughout Tennessee, and although he is now pursuing a nursing degree, he continues to teach for CALA each summer.

Jeddeeni, a native of Syria, earned his bachelor's in English literature in 2006 from the University of Damascus. He came to MTSU as a graduate student after receiving a Fulbright FLTA (Foreign Language Teaching Assistant) award in 2009 and taught Arabic classes for two semesters. In

July 2012, Ahmad began teaching Arabic for CALA at MTSU, where he has been awarded a graduate teaching assistantship at MTSU for the next two years.

Walker Purcell assisted with the business side of the language institute. He has worked for the past year managing the CALA registration page and website, videotaping, doing public relations, and developing materials for teachers.

The Summer Language Institute also offered training in methodology. Both Rutherford Schools and Murfreesboro City Schools have sent teachers to the institute. It has helped foreign language teachers and teachers of students learning English as a foreign or second language.

"None of this would have been possible without the support of many people, including the past three deans of the Honors College, the past three chairs of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, and the past two deans of Liberal Arts and the Graduate School," Thomas said. ■