Sacred Heart University

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Sacred Heart University put the spotlight on reading and language arts recently with its fourth annual literacy conference, “Motivating through Literacy: Practice, Perspective, Promise.”

From left are Professor Kristin Rainville, keynote speaker Katie Egan Cunningham, Professors Eleanor Osborne, Karen Waters and Farrington College of Education Dean James Carl.

Sacred Heart University put the spotlight on reading and language arts recently with its fourth annual literacy conference, “Motivating through Literacy: Practice, Perspective, Promise.”

The conference, which took place at the University’s Cambridge Commons in Trumbull, was orchestrated by Karen Waters, SHU’s program director for literacy in the Isabelle Farrington College of Education’s Department of Leadership and Literacy. Twenty-two candidates were charged with presenting topics of interest related to the theme. The candidates included adjunct instructors, principals, reading and literacy specialists, writing and special education teachers, humanities coaches and more. They came from schools in various Connecticut communities: Bethel, Bridgeport, Brookfield, Darien, Fairfield, Hamden, New Canaan, Monroe, Ridgefield, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, Weston and Wilton.

“This is their capstone experience—the culmination of 12 courses and several years of hard work,” said Waters. “They are certified teachers who have already earned state certification for remedial reading and remedial language arts and are now pursuing the state certificate for reading consultant. They have
conducted action research over the course of two semesters under the direction and guidance of Professor Eleanor Osborne, who has coached them along the way."

Osborne, an adjunct professor of advanced literacy methods at SHU, called the candidate group “amazing,” noting that one was tapped as Teacher of the Year in Bridgeport, one is published and another is about to be published. “These are our future literacy leaders,” she said. “They are compassionate, dedicated professionals, and Dr. Waters has been instrumental in seeing this conference come to fruition.”

Fourteen presentations were split into two sessions across seven classrooms. One of the presentations, “The Power of Collaboration: Tips for an Effective Home/School Connection,” was co-presented by Susan Desrochers, a reading teacher/literacy coach at Huckleberry Elementary School, Brookfield, and Diana Bernardo, a second-grade teacher at Frank A. Berry Elementary School, Bethel. Their talk explored research behind parents’ involvement in spurring a love of reading at home and shared strategies for teachers with regard to guiding parents in that goal. “This is an exciting day; the relationships we’ve built here with the faculty is one of the best of gifts,” said Desrochers about the experience.

Waters described this culminating step as the candidates’ “foray into the arena of professional development” and added that, “As reading consultants, they will be called upon to conduct professional development in their schools. They will also be encouraged to present at the regional and national level. This is their first opportunity to cultivate that practice.”

Students taking courses in literacy at SHU were invited to the conference, as well as members of the community and area schools. University faculty and adjunct professors also attended in support. A total of 100 registered.

“This conference continues to grow, and it’s very important that we are able to provide opportunities for our reading specialists to present their research and methods for literacy with other educators throughout the county and state,” said Jim Carl, professor and dean of the College of Education.

Carl helped introduce keynote speaker Katie Egan Cunningham, assistant professor at Manhattanville College and author of *Story: Still the Heart of Literacy Learning*. Cunningham, who also is a lecturer, staff developer and co-author of a popular blog, “The Classroom Bookshelf,” remarked, “I’m thrilled and humbled to be here. What a tremendous commitment for educators to be here on a Saturday morning. I’m excited to talk about the power of stories in our lives and classrooms.”

Teaching intern Katelyn Battinelli was particularly excited to attend the conference. On the path to earning her master’s degree at SHU, Battinelli said, “Literacy is so important. Karen Waters urged us to dive deeper into this focus. I hope to gain insights that will help me in my future teaching career.”