

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

OU grad earns International Reading Association award

By **Katie Land**, news editor

The International Reading Association (IRA) has welcomed another Oakland University member to its distinguished fold. Karen Reese, a graduate of the Teaching of Reading and Language Arts Ph.D. program, is a finalist for the Dissertation of the Year award.

She joins Reading and Language Arts department members Linda Ayres, Jim Ciplewski, Lidong Li and a number of doctoral students in this recognition. Reese's dissertation dealt with identifying and teaching at-risk first graders to read as well as their grade level peers.

"I am truly honored to be distinguished alongside my mentors, Ron Cramer and Linda Ayres, who have helped me complete my study by providing coaching, feedback and lots of praise," Reese said.

The Outstanding Dissertation of the Year Award is a \$1,000 prize for dissertations in reading or related fields. Each study is assessed in light of this approach, the scholarly qualification of its report and its significant contributions to knowledge within the reading field, according to Ayres, visiting assistant professor of education and winner of the 1993 Outstanding Dissertation of the Year award. Each year, nine finalists and one winner are selected.

"Within the literacy profession, Oakland University has acquired a reputation for excellence as we have won more of these awards than any other university in Michigan and perhaps even in the country," said Ron Cramer, distinguished professor of education and reading and language arts at Oakland and a member of Reese's doctoral committee.

Reese is known as a dedicated and motivated teacher and student, according to Ayres. Her work is considered by many to touch on one of the most pressing issues in America's educational system today, Ayres continued.

"Karen is a creative teacher and a careful researcher who is quick to see the merits of a successful approach and meticulous in its implementation," Ayres said. "Her 14 plus years of classroom experience has filled her with a sense of urgency with regard to the instruction of at-risk students, which her study addressed."

At-risk students are often children with no preschool or kindergarten experience, English as a Second Language (ESL) students and children who have moved multiple times throughout the school year.

"Karen's study was conducted in her own classroom with seven of her lowest achieving students, but they did not fail to learn to read," said Ayres. "In fact, her students learned to read at the level of their peers by the end of the year. Every teacher, principal and superintendent in America needs to know how she did that."

By using a combination of the Language Experience Approach (LEA), which utilizes dictated student language as reading material, and a shared book approach, where students follow along with a story using a large version of the text, Reese was ultimately successful.

The study began with a passion to make a difference in the lives of at-risk students. The award validates her time and research and will help to market her instructional approach to publishers and other practicing teachers, according to Reese.

She said the most difficult obstacle was to work full-time as a first grade teacher while conducting and preparing research.

"For an entire year, I ate lunch at my computer while recording data and spent most of my evening reviewing transcripts," Reese continued. "After collecting my data, I had to discipline myself to write every single day. I would come home from work, take an hour nap and write until midnight for six months. It was exhausting, but by writing each day, I never lost my momentum and eventually I finished."

The hard work paid off, and Reese is now teaching the approach to first-grade teachers in her home district of Troy Public Schools. She hopes to publish a book in the future.



OU graduate Karen Reese is a finalist for the IRA Dissertation of the Year Award.

SUMMARY

Oakland University graduate Karen Reese was named a finalist for the International Reading Association's Dissertation of the Year award for her work with at-risk first graders.

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