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Faculty and Staff Highlights: Dorothy Armstrong Professor of Education

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Colleagues: What brought you to Grand Valley State University and why did you stay?

Armstrong: It was exciting for me to come to a campus that housed multiple colleges that allowed learners to engage their education from different pedagogical perspectives. When I came in 1980, I had just completed serving as a coordinator for a large federal grant in gifted and talented education in Wisconsin. The School of Education, as it was known then, had a master's track in gifted education but did not have faculty experienced in this area. I was invited to teach a course in gifted education and that began my 30+ year tenure at Grand Valley.

Grand Valley has provided a supportive environment that has allowed me to continue to grow as a professional. I
have developed innovative programs for both Grand Valley students and area k-12 students and their teachers.

**Colleagues:** What have been some of the most important accomplishments you have achieved during your time at Grand Valley?

**Armstrong:** I have taught both undergraduate and graduate courses as well as supervising practica in the areas of early childhood education, elementary education, gifted and talented, and elementary and secondary reading. Most recently I have been involved in the development of the Graduate Teacher Certification Program, which we designed to serve returning adults who wished to earn initial teacher certification. We redesigned the master’s in gifted and talented to have a broader focus that we named Educational Differentiation. We are now developing pedagogically strong online instruction in both of these programs.

From 1981 until 1997, I ran a program on the Allendale campus named Focus on Ability that served about 300 k-8 students from the tri-county area each summer. The young students told us what they would like to learn; teachers, who were earning a degree in gifted education, came in three weeks before the students to develop the curriculum around those interests. Finally, the k-8 students engaged the curriculum using the resources of the university. Students and teachers returned each summer to this learning community, and I continue to hear from many of them.

For three years beginning in 1984, I wrote the grant and administered the Summer Institute for the Arts and Sciences program. Only five of the state universities were awarded grants to offer this program, which was designed to serve high-ability students from all high schools in the state.

**Armstrong:** One very important partnership was with Muskegon Heights and Grand Rapids Public Schools. We were able to provide tuition and transportation to students who might otherwise not have had the resources to attend Focus on Ability. The districts provided transportation and scholarships for their students for one year. Most of the students wanted to return so our program covered the scholarships for returning students; the districts offered the program to additional students.

For years I served as a member of Kent Intermediate School District Gifted and Talented Advisory Committee. As the liaison from Grand Valley, I developed links through which GVSU provided professional development, hosted conventions, and co-sponsored programs for teachers and or students.

I had the opportunity to develop international partnerships when I served half time as Director of International Studies. Although not in the School of Education, the partnerships that I started with Kingston Polytechnic in England, National ChengChi in Taiwan, as well as running the student and faculty exchange programs with the Krakow University of Economics, International Christian University, and the University of Sarajevo, provided opportunities for study abroad for our students and faculty.

**Colleagues:** What are your hopes and dreams for the future of the College of Education?

**Armstrong:** There has never been a time when so many have been so focused on education. We must be open to creative ways to re-conceptualize learning and teaching. What we have accomplished in the first 50 years in the College of Education is a prologue to the future. It is a time of opportunity for our people, programs and partnerships.