

International Trips Opening Up A New World For Educators

Pryor Visits Literacy Issues

GVSU School of Education professor Sherrill Pryor, along with other school library media services and technology educators from throughout the United States, traveled to the Orient as part of an information exchange.

A delegation of 45 people from 22 states made the trip to China as part of the People to People Ambassador Program.

"It was a large variety of people, but all had some interest in library services for youth," Pryor said.

During the two-week trip in October, the group visited library media centers in major Chinese cities such as Beijing, as well as more remote locations. Pryor met with the Chinese Minister of Education and other officials involved with literacy issues.

"The thing I really noticed is that whether you're here in the United States or in China, educators and leaders alike are really dedicated to young people," Pryor said. "They take what resources they have and make the best of it."

The library system in China is about 20 years behind that in the United States but is following the same path as the United States, according to Pryor, who is writing an article and preparing a presentation on her trip.

"We observed how they run those centers and how they educate media specialists and implement education programs in general," Pryor said.

Pryor said that a Western influence is slowly making its way into the literary mainstream in China, especially at the impressionable learning ages.

"The state is the major publisher in China and they are trying to get copyright contracts with English classics and children's literature to pro-



Sherrill Pryor, center, meets with colleagues in China as part of the People to People Ambassador Program.

duce books with more appeal to children," Pryor said. "They are concerned about literacy."

Still, the country of 1.3 billion has a long way to go to catch up, she said.

"It was a great opportunity to be reflective for what I believe in, not only as a professional, but as a citizen of this country," Pryor said. "What we have is not something to be taken for granted. It is precious."

"It opens up a new dialogue with students back here."

South African Experience Is Fit For King

A partnership between Grand Valley State University and the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa may begin as early as fall, 2000. As a prelude to the program, GVSU professor Caryn King traveled to the country last fall.

During her two-week excursion to South Africa, King visited elementary schools and universities and shared expertise on literacy instruction. Among the places visited were major cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town. The delegation met with Ministry of Education officials, university professors and teachers in K-6 classrooms.

"They are working on implementing Goals 2000 on a pilot basis to promote a higher order of thinking skills," King said.

South African class sizes are nearly twice those of the United States with 45 to 50 students per teacher.

"As in most foreign countries, the biggest problems are with resources," King said.

The educational system is examination driven, according to King. Most exams are written in English, but it is only one of nearly a dozen official national languages.

"One of the things that really struck me was that South Africa is a very multilingual society," King said. "English is the language of the educated, but with the adoption of Curriculum 2000, the African National Congress has also adopted 11 official languages."

The delegation took books and materials and distributed them to the schools it visited, while asking and answering ques-

tions about implementing ideas and teaching methods.

"We shared ideas and took the attitude that we were going to learn, rather than going there with the attitude that we were the experts," King said. "We didn't want to impose our values on them."

GVSU may send a cohort of students to South Africa as soon as fall of the 2000-2001 school year to complete the teacher assisting or student teaching portion of their education requirements. An arrangement is being established with the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town.

"It is a very Westernized culture and South Africans are a very warm, loving people," King said. "But many other South Africans are holding on to their tradition as well. It is an amazing blend of modern and ancient values, and that's pretty consistent across the country."



A class size with up to 50 students per teacher is commonplace in South African elementary schools.

CSAL Servicing And Also Learning

The master's program of College Student Affairs Leadership (CSAL) is making a service-oriented trip to Puebla, Mexico, this spring. The contingent of 11 students will study at the University of the Americas in Puebla.

Headed by Student Services representatives Ginger Randall and Jay Cooper, the CSAL trip — funded in part by the Philanthropy Center — is a three-faceted program. It allows students to study a campus and student affairs in a different cultural setting from what they experience in the United States; provides a multicultural experience outside their own; and provides a public service activity while they are there.

CSAL is designed to prepare individuals for a career in college or university administration.

"Exposing students to different kinds of educational systems gives them a better understanding of their own," said Randall, who is assistant dean of students.