

School of Education Is Reaching Out Into Communities

Cross Cultural Student Teaching Program In Florida Is Full Of Sun, Fun & Diversity

Diversity is the key component to the School of Education's Cross Cultural Student Teaching program in Broward County, Fla.

The program assigns student teachers to classrooms in a multi-ethnic school district where 159 countries and 52 languages are represented among the 270,000 elementary and secondary students in the K-12 system. Broward County Public Schools is the fifth largest district in the United States and the district has an influx of 5,000 to 8,000 new students a year. Most of those students are from South America, the Caribbean and Cuba.

"By 2020, half of the population in the U.S. will be comprised of what we currently consider minorities," said School of Education professor Dr. Patsy Fox, who is field coordinator and supervisor for the program. "To prepare our teachers to be able to meet the needs of the student population, we need to make every effort to learn about the influx of cultures, their uniqueness, language and their commitment to and expectations of educators. We need to prepare our future teachers to be successful in being able to relate to and teach these students."

The program provides an opportunity to fulfill

the student teaching component of the education requirement in one of the more diverse multi-cultural settings in the United States.

With fewer positions available in Michigan and an increased need for teachers in settings with a high percentage of students from minority or English as a second language homes, the program provides an insight – and perhaps inside track – to jobs in Florida after graduation. Fox said that all GVSU student teachers participating in the program this spring have been offered positions in the Broward County school system.

Students participating in the Cross Cultural program have completed their student assisting component. They live in housing units with comparable rates to GVSU student housing and are provided with a \$300 stipend to assist with travel costs to and from Florida.

Seven students – Julie A. Fuhrmann, Holly Gradbowski, Jenny Kolodziej, Kat Maddox, Stacie L. Scholten, Jenny R. Shinsky and Jennifer R. Sieracki -- participated in the inaugural program during the winter 2004 semester. Seven more students have signed up to participate in the fall program.

"This experience is preparing them to be able to teach in a multicultural setting and they have gained understanding of the cultures of the varied students and how to use this knowledge to be great teachers," Fox said. "Being able to provide a multicultural experience as this and student teaching along side a multicultural staff – including individuals from South America, the Caribbean and Cuba -- could not be accomplished in Michigan."

"I'm very proud of how our student teachers have performed and conducted themselves here in Broward County Public Schools. Over and over again, staff members here have stated that these are the 'best prepared' student teachers they've encountered."

Involved with Fox administering the Cross



Julie Fuhrmann shares a moment with students of the Broward County, Fla., Public School District.

Cultural Student Teacher experience are former School of Education interim Dean Anne Mulder, who is the on-site coordinator, and School of Education professor Dr. Loretta Konecki, who wrote the multicultural grant for the program.

"It is a wonderful program because it gives students a very multicultural urban placement with a lot of support," Konecki said.

Those interested in signing up for the Cross Cultural Student Teaching program for the winter 2005 semester must apply by September 15. Application for a Florida Student Teaching certificate must be made by Oct. 1.

Among the requirements for eligibility are those students who will graduate at the end of student teaching, completion of all the major and minor Michigan and MTTC tests, recommendations from a major/minor academic advisor, excellent student assisting evaluations, participating in extra seminars prior to the Florida trip and a commitment to urban youth with varied backgrounds.

Application forms are available at the Student & Information Services Center on the first floor of the Eberhard Center. Additional information may be obtained by contacting Darlene Zwart (zwartd@gvsu.edu) at 616.331.6235.



GVSU student teacher Jennifer Rolodje helps students at Cypress Elementary.

MTEC Service Learning Project Plays Big Role In Community

A program creating role models for the future has already accomplished its objective. For students participating in the Minority Teacher Education Cohort's Service Learning Project – and for the younger students whose lives they touch -- the future is now.

The purpose of the Minority Teacher Education Cohort (MTEC) Service Learning Project is to develop and coordinate a service-learning program in which MTEC students can give back to the community experiences and reflections they have obtained throughout their current and continuing academic career.

"So few teachers of color are present within the Grand Rapids community, we wanted MTEC students to work with young K-12 students within the community," said program coordinator April Smith. "We wanted to put

college students of color who are pursuing teaching careers into those classrooms to serve as role models."

The initiative offers MTEC students experiential learning by connecting them with programs in the Grand Rapids Public Schools district and the West Michigan community. MTEC students work as mentors, tutors, and educators to encourage young students to achieve and succeed.

Smith worked with School of Education professor Susan Carson and MTEC coordinator Connie Dang from the GVSU Office of Multicultural Affairs to implement the service learning project that not only benefits MTEC students, but also the K-12 students in the Grand Rapids Public Schools system.

The MTEC Service Learning Project began

its pilot program in the fall semester of 2002 and the numbers have grown considerably since then.

This year, 51 MTEC juniors and seniors participated in the program.

The Service Learning Project consists of two components. One is mentoring and tutoring young students in the United Methodist Community House Youth Center. The other includes classroom visits to Burton Elementary School and Burton Middle School, where volunteers teach skills for lifelong learning and encourage young educators who are interested in teaching.

"We want to continue to build rapport within the K-12 community and empower all students within the educational community and help them achieve success," Smith said.