

So You Want to Teach...?



Everyone who wants to teach faces the question, *“What shall I teach?”* Some people know immediately because they love math or want to be a coach. Others, however, struggle with the possibilities. For those of you aren’t sure, the next two editions of the newsletter are designed to help you answer that question. This edition focuses on English/language arts, math, and art. Our spring edition will focus on social studies, science, and foreign language. Faculty members from across the college, who have also taught at the elementary and secondary levels, have offered some advice to those of you considering these subjects. As you will see from their biographies, they have a wealth of teaching experience in various locations. We hope their comments will help you with this important decision.

Make Reading Fun

Mrs. Mary Bayer taught 1st and 2nd grades in the Detroit area, and 5th, 7th, and 8th grade reading and language arts in Grand Rapids area Catholic Schools. Currently she teaches Children’s Literature and Multicultural Children’s Literature in the GRCC English Department.

It is never too early to encourage a child to read and appreciate books. Even pre-K youngsters are introduced to letters and pictures. Those are their building blocks toward reading.

In addition to your major subject area, you need to be familiar with best practices in the teaching of reading. Decoding, phonics, and reading comprehension are three of the main skills that you will help your students to learn. To do that, you need to have good book presentation and questioning skills. First of all, become familiar with the Caldecott Award books, as well as other outstanding authors and illustrators of children’s books. When selecting and evaluating the literature that you will present to your students, be sure that you include suitable multicultural pieces as well.

These are the kinds of books that you will want your children to see as well as hear, so when you are reading to them, be sure that they can all view the illustrations. Secondly, encourage students to “hypothesize” about stories. It is an active way to get

children engaged because they are making predictions about a story’s action, characters, or setting. You should also keep a list of questions about the story and create related activities suitable for the classroom and age group. Doing this will bring the stories to life, and children will learn that reading is fun.

Broaden Your Horizons

Mrs. Joy McNabb has taught 4th and 5th grades in Hastings, Michigan, in an upper elementary multi-graded classroom in Grand Rapids, and coordinated Kent County’s Project Charlie, a drug prevention program for elementary students. She teaches Children’s Literature in the GRCC English Department.

Reading is at the heart of everything we teach, so keep your skills sharp in this area. I deliberately took a wide variety of classes in different disciplines to help me teach them all more effectively. For my history minor, I took classes that I might be teaching in social studies at the elementary level such as U.S. History and Michigan History. In language arts specifically, there are many ways that you can use children’s literature to reinforce the other subjects you may teach. For example, you can supplement social studies with children’s literature from a specific time period to help students to see that history is about people. You can also supplement science texts with children’s literature to give more in-depth information on a subject.

Professional development is invaluable to you in your career as a teacher, so take advantage of organizations, along with their conferences and journals that focus on your subject areas. One organization for me is The Michigan Reading Association. This group holds its annual conference in Grand Rapids every other year, and conference participants get a chance to hear many authors talk about their works. Several years ago I saw Denise Fleming who wrote *In the Small, Small Pond*, and she demonstrated how she makes and dyes her own paper for her books. If you are a student, they offer special registration rates.

In addition to all of this, be sure to keep up with current teaching practices and learn what the state is setting as curriculum. It is what will help you to become an effective teacher.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Make Reading Fun	1
Broaden Your Horizons	1
Number Sense in the Elementary Classroom.....	2
Keeping it Real.....	2
The Art of it All.....	3
Teachers of Tomorrow Scholarships Available	3
Literature Alive!	3
Michigan Certification Requirements	4



A sizeable number of students are interested in teaching in special education classrooms.

Number Sense in the Elementary Classroom

Mrs. Julie Hess taught high school mathematics at her former high school in Cincinnati, Ohio. After leaving Ohio, she taught math and physics at the high school level in Kentucky before coming to Michigan. Currently, she is a member of the mathematics faculty at GRCC.

Teaching math is far more than giving students “recipes” to follow to get the right answer. Not only must they be able to perform the necessary steps, but they must also understand the concepts behind what they do. Just like teachers of reading, teachers of math must give students a good foundation for their future studies. Otherwise they will struggle when they move on to more advanced mathematics. It is an enormous responsibility.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics created a list of national standards suggesting what mathematics should be taught K-12. One idea that was emphasized in those standards was the development of “number sense.” This means that students should have a good feeling for the size of a number, know different ways to represent a number, understand the meanings of operations on numbers, as well as be able to estimate a reasonable solution to a problem.

Can you do the following problems in your head without wanting paper and pencil or a calculator: $97+128$ or 99×6 ? Can you estimate the value of 0.26×84 ? If not, don’t feel bad! Developing a good number sense, like everything else in life, takes practice. In many elementary schools across our nation, the math curricula have had an emphasis on memorizing algorithms, not on developing a real understanding of concepts. The good news is that it is changing. The introduction of the NCTM standards has put more focus on elementary mathematics and many schools are changing their curricula and methods of instruction. It’s an exciting time to be teaching elementary school mathematics.

At the end of the semester I ask the students in my Math for Elementary Teachers course to write a paper telling me how they felt about teaching math before taking the course and how they felt after taking the course. The most common response is that going into the semester they think, “How hard can it be? It’s arithmetic.” After taking the course they realize that **teaching** math and **doing** math are two very different things. It is not enough just to show HOW to do something; it is even more important to show WHY you do it. Taking Math 210 and 211 will help you to delve more deeply into the mathematics you learned in elementary school to help you understand why those algorithms work, learn how to teach these concepts using manipulatives, and last—but not least—gain a better number sense of your own!

Keeping it Real

Ms. Brianna Lodholtz, mathematics faculty member at GRCC, was a long-term substitute teacher at Union High School in Grand Rapids following her college graduation. After leaving Union, she went on to teach math in grades 9-12 at Jenison High School. Her courses included algebra, geometry, advanced algebra, and some remedial algebra and geometry.

For you to be a successful student of mathematics, you have to be organized, detailed and a good problem solver. Sometimes it is even required that you think “outside the box.” As with many other subjects, determination is a big factor, so don’t give up. That’s because you will want to instill that same determination in your own students. To successfully teach mathematics, it will be important for you to be a good listener. One of the biggest challenges for me is trying to determine where a student is getting confused. I have to listen to what they are saying or asking in order to be able to recognize where their confusion lies. Sometimes it is almost like trying to decipher a code when I check student work because it is not clear where a certain value came from. As math teachers, we must know when the chain of understanding breaks down for a student in order for us to know how to fill in the gaps. Also, because math is not just working with numbers, reading and writing skills are important as well. Often story problems are presented in real life settings, and without the ability to read and comprehend what is being asked, or what information is being presented, the math is nearly impossible.

Effective math teachers have the ability to demonstrate the mathematical procedures in multiple modes, accommodating students’ different learning styles. They must also be approachable so that students are willing to seek help and not be afraid to ask questions. For many students, as well as people in general, mathematics is already intimidating, so it is helpful when the instructor is friendly, honest, caring, and respected. Then the students know that they have an advocate, someone who is willing to help them become successful.

Prospective teachers need to know that they are teaching people, not subjects. Each student that you encounter brings his or her own “baggage” and educational background that must be considered. For me, relating math to the real world has proven successful and has motivated students to want to learn because they see the point to it all. I love mathematics but I really love watching a student develop an interest in and appreciation for it as well. You too must care about your students, be encouraging and helpful. Those three qualities equal a great math experience for everyone.

The Art of it All

Ms. Susan Lockwood, a practicing artist, teaches art in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, Art for Educators here at GRCC.

Art can be used to teach just about every other subject in a different way, so as you prepare yourself for art education, be sure that you have good writing skills and communications skills. Take related courses in children's literature, speech, and art history because you will have a background in areas in which art is frequently used. For example, children's books have colorful illustrations, speeches sometimes require visuals of different types, and art history provides a reference point as you teach about artists and their work. Become familiar with community resources such as museums and libraries, take field trips to these locations, and learn to utilize technology. All of these can provide classroom support and additional learning experiences for your students.

Most importantly, know that everyone can teach art and they don't have to be "artistic" to do it well. Emphasize the importance of art in life to children and help them to see everyday objects with more of an artist's eye. If you have high expectations for your students and take time to learn each of their strengths and weaknesses, that will build a solid base for individualized instruction.

Teachers of Tomorrow Scholarships Available!

Requirements:

1. Be accepted to Grand Rapids Community College.
2. Successfully complete a minimum of 15 college credits.
3. Have an established **college** GPA of 2.8 or higher.
4. Have an academic curriculum code that indicates EDUCATION as your career goal (check with your counselor to find out the correct code).
5. Plan to be enrolled at GRCC for the fall semester **with at least 6 credits** (scholarships are for GRCC only; they are NOT transferable).
6. Submit a completed GRCC Foundation Scholarship Application and **Unofficial** copy of your transcripts to Financial Aid by **March 15**. These applications are available from the Financial Aid office, first floor of the Main Building.
7. Submit the following to **Staci Dever in Room 308 Main by March 15**:
 - A completed Teachers of Tomorrow Scholarship application form
 - A 500 word, double-spaced, typed essay responding to the following prompt: *"What are three qualities of an effective teacher? Use examples from your personal experience that illustrate each of those qualities."* This essay will be evaluated on qualities of content **and** mechanical accuracy.
 - Two letters of recommendation; one should be from a GRCC faculty member. Do not use family members.
 - A resume, indicating your teaching major subject, minor subject, and the grade level you plan to teach (elementary or secondary).

For more information, contact: Staci Dever, (616) 234-3380 or sdever@grcc.edu

Thought for the Winter semester:

"Don't put ideas into someone else's head; let them construct their own."

Literature Alive!

Mrs. Carole Redwine taught composition and literature in grades 7-11 in Ann Arbor, Michigan and New Orleans, Louisiana. She is a retired professor of English at GRCC, having taught EN 101, 102 and African American Literature.

So you think you want to teach English in high school? First of all, let me offer my congratulations. Second of all, you know that many students say that they "hate" English. That means that you will have to be the teacher who will turn them around.

I began my teaching career in middle school, but looked forward to moving to the high school level because I had *loved* my high school English classes. I think that it was because my teachers brought literature and writing to life, and as a high school English teacher, you have to do the same. Keep in mind that English classes are very compartmentalized at the high school level. In fact, each grade level—nine through twelve—will probably have specific courses that are taught.

To begin with, **you** need to be a strong reader and writer. Don't just limit yourself to what you have to read in your college classes, but browse bookstores to see what other titles and types of literature you find appealing. The more you read, the more you also discover varieties in writing styles, and this will help you to help your students shape their own writing. I would also suggest that you take history classes as relevant electives because much literature is born during time periods that have unique cultural aspects, and those need to be discussed as part of the literature's meaning and impact on us as readers.

Effective English teachers combine reading and writing always, because there would not be one without the other. You should be prepared to model writing for your students by writing with them. For example, when you ask them for a paper, show them how you might get started on the same assignment. If you ask them to write a haiku, write one as well. Discuss your work and talk about any problems you might have encountered. The point is to let them know that you understand how difficult writing can be. With literature, have them listen as you read aloud sometimes, or use CD's that allow them to hear how the characters act and interact. Then, when they have to read silently, they can have a better sense of the rhythm and emotion of the piece. It will seem more alive. Lastly, let students try their hand at writing a brief *narrative* response to the story instead of the usual analytical one. Maybe they can create an alternative ending or follow one of the characters beyond the ending into another scenario.

It is important to know that teaching English is time-consuming work. Yes, there are those essays that you have to edit and respond to. Then there are the readings that you have to review in order to create engaging discussions and activities. Yet teaching English is *vital* work because you are preparing students for a world that needs articulate communication and thoughtful analysis.

In addition to deciding on your major, you also need to know what else is required to become a teacher in Michigan. The information below comes from the Michigan Department of Education website.

Read this carefully so that you will be aware of what to expect as you continue your teacher education preparation.

What is required for a person to become certified to teach in Michigan?

Michigan Applicants

(teacher preparation program was completed at a Michigan college/university)

In order to obtain a **Provisional (initial) teaching certificate**, an applicant must meet the following requirements:

1. Has earned at least a bachelor's degree.
2. Has completed a specific teacher education program at an approved teacher preparation institution. Michigan minimum standards require:
 - Completion of an approved program of general or liberal education, including English, literature, humanities, social sciences, mathematics, natural or physical sciences, and the arts.
 - Completion of an approved program in the substantive field(s) to be taught.
 - Completion of at least 20 semester hours in professional education courses including at least six semester hours of directed teaching).

For a Secondary Provisional Certificate

- Completion of a major of no less than 30 semester hours or a group major of no less than 36 semester hours in a specific substantive field, and completion of 3 semester hours in the teaching of reading.

For an Elementary Provisional Certificate

- Completion of a major of not less than 30 semester hours or a group major of 36 semester hours and a planned program minor of 20 semester hours in other substantive fields deemed appropriate to elementary education; **OR** three minors of at least 20 semester hours each (two of which shall be in substantive fields and the third a minor of at least 20 semester hours in content areas appropriate to elementary education). Applicants for the elementary Provisional certificate must also complete six semester hours in the teaching of reading.

(Candidates for teacher certification must seek specific advice from the Michigan college/university where they are completing their teacher preparation program.)

3. Has completed a course in first aid training that includes cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for both children and adults. This course may be completed through the American Red Cross, the American Heart Association, or from a comparable organization approved by the Michigan Department of Education.
4. Has passed the appropriate Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC) examinations.
5. Has paid the appropriate application evaluation fee.

While you are still in the teacher education program here at GRCC, it is crucial that you check with your transfer institution to see what their requirements are for your taking the Michigan Test of Basic Skills. Colleges and universities may require that you take this exam BEFORE you transfer. Some recommend that both semesters of English Composition and Intermediate Algebra be completed prior to taking the exam. See the October issue of the Teacher Education newsletter for exam dates and website.



Halima Ismail of Grand Rapids Public Schools discusses "Sheltered Instruction" as a strategy for English Language Learners.



Seminar presenter discusses the various categories that fall under "Special Education."

teacher EDUCATION

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