Early Childhood Students Meet with State Representatives

Early Childhood Education Assistant Professor Ann Epstein, Ph.D has known for years that helping future teachers learn how to speak to issues regarding the education of young children is an important part of her job. This year, she put out a call for interested students to join the Wisconsin Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (WACTE) statewide meeting during the annual “Day on the Hill” in Madison on April 8th, but Emerson teachers and students preparing well in advance. Fourth graders read the award-winning Rickshaw Girl and fifth graders read The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Susie Sien. Both books were a hit with students, who shared their writings and classroom projects based on their reading at the event.

Author Mitali Perkins knows how to work an audience. Especially if the audience consists of 110 fourth and fifth graders from Emerson Elementary. Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse Public Education Foundation collaborated with teachers from Emerson Elementary School to provide a morning of insights into diverse cultures and the art of storytelling. The morning also provided UW-L education majors an opportunity to observe the power of connecting authors with children. The Multicultural Children’s Literature event was held in the Cleary Center on April 8th, but Emerson teachers and students began preparing in advance. Fourth graders read the award-winning Rickshaw Girl and fifth graders read The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Susie Sien. Both books were a hit with students, who shared their writings and classroom projects based on their reading at the event.

Author Mitali Perkins was clearly moved when the children presented her with the gift of a large book they had constructed and filled with their writings and artwork. The children shared family stories similar to the situations of characters in Perkins’s books, to the delight of the author, and the family members in the audience. Mitali brought her presentation to life by incorporating all five senses into her presentation. Students mashed traditional spices using a mortar and pestle, listened to Bangladesh music, and even dressed in native Bangledeshi clothing. Two boys acted out a traditional village scene of bargaining over the price of bananas with enthusiasm. It was hard to tell who was enjoying the experience the most; was it the children, the audience, or the author herself?

Later in the day, Mitali gave two presentations for adults in the Collaborative Learning Studio at Murphy Library focused on writing and publishing. Both were well-received by UW-L students, faculty members, and local teachers. For more information about the author, visit her website at mitaliperkins.com.

Senator Jennifer Shilling, right, spends time with UW-L students at the State of Wisconsin Capitol.

State Senator Jennifer Shilling. The students exhibited a hint of nervousness, but by the end of the day everyone had positive feelings about the event. Representative Billings stated that she was, “Impressed with the professionalism and the dedication,” of the UW-L students.

Undergraduate Amanda Wagner said, “This experience has shown me that representatives will listen.” Ann Epstein reflected, “This experience will definitely impact me as a future educator. When I decided to be a teacher, I didn’t realize all that goes into it. Not only do we teach our students, but we may be called to do even more for them.”

After attending the WACTE meeting, students met with School of Education Director Marcie Wycoff-Horn, Ph.D, and Sheila Wirkus, Director of Field Experience, and proceeded to the capital building for their meeting with Senator Shilling. Even though the final senate session of the year was Meet the Reps continued on page 4.
Music Education Updates

Music Education—Choral Emphasis

Choral Music Education students as well as other UW-L singers will have the chance to be members of the UW-La Crosse Concert Choir’s performance at the "Disney Concert Hall" in Los Angeles, CA in June 2015. The University’s premier choral group was invited, to audition to perform at the Los Angeles International Music Festival. An international orchestra and an American university wind ensemble was also be chosen for this performance. Concert Choir members will perform in either San Francisco or San Diego and spend a day at Disneyland as a part of this tour. They will sing two other concerts during this week-long experience.

Music Education—Instrumental Emphasis

Instrumental Music Education students will benefit from Dr. Tammy Fisher’s research project in collaboration with the University of North Carolina—Greensboro Music Research Institute. The purpose of the project is to show that noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is an increasingly prevalent disorder in band students that results from exposure to high-intensity sound, especially over a long period of time. Students in the marching band wore doseBadges which measured, stored and calculated the decibel levels students experienced over the span of 16 rehearsals. As a result, many students are wearing special music earplugs. One goal of the study is to better educate the students about “healthy hearing” practices.

Music Education Major—General Music Emphasis

Every other year, Music Education Major—General Music Emphasis students see first-hand how music captivates pre-school children during weekly “Music Play” sessions at the Campus Child Center at UW-La Crosse. The attraction and participation observed in these young enthusiasts is quite remarkable. Young children epitomize our very best students; eager and unashamed. Their willingness to participate is complete, taking place on many different levels at once.

Children not only desire to participate and be part of music, they also learn at an astonishing rate. These children are not instructed to learn or memorize songs, but they do. Children also begin to mimic tones and pitches, often following rhythms of a song they may have only sung once or twice. Music has the ability to teach, augment and enhance the learning process with astonishing ease. Children also display creative musical input for improvisational songs during the course of “Music Play.”

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Honoring Our Partners in Education, Regional Teachers Make a Difference

According to New York Times columnist, Nicholas Kristof, “Having a good fourth grade teacher makes a student 1.25 percent more likely to go to college, the research suggests, and 1.25 percent less likely to get pregnant as a teenager. Each of the students will go on as an adult to earn, on average, $25,000 more over a lifetime — or about $700,000 in gains for an average size class — all attributable to that ace teacher back in the fourth grade. That’s right: A great teacher is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to each year’s students, just in the extra income they will earn.”

While the value of a good teacher is unquestioned, it takes a unique partnership between UW-La Crosse School of Education and our region’s schools to provide our teacher candidates with the opportunities to merge their strong content and pedagogical study with practical classroom practice — to become those good teachers for our community and our nation.

UW-L, in conjunction with other member Wisconsin institutions of higher education, and the Wisconsin Association of Colleges for Teacher Education honored three area cooperating teachers for their pre-service educator mentoring of UW-L teacher candidates. Joseph Anghebar from La Crosse Central High School, La Crosse Higbee Elementary School’s Sharon Hills, and Janelle Lautenberg from Logan Middle School were honored for their work with UW-L’s education field experience students as well as student teachers. All three area teachers have mentored many UW-L teacher candidates, and have contributed to the professional development of our graduates by providing in-depth teaching experiences in their classrooms.

Awards also went to five UW-L graduates and beginning teachers – Early Career Educator Awards – for their instructional success in their first years of teaching. These five awards went to Heidi Wrobel who teaches at both Logan Middle School and Northwoods International School, and to Kyle Emmert who is teaching at Prairie Elementary School in Waukauke, Wis. Amanda Johnson, currently teaching at Milwaukee Roosevelt Creative Arts Middle School, Sarah Higley from Baraboo Elementary School and Sarah Liedel, who is teaching at Coulee Christian School in West Salem, rounded out this group of Early Career Educator Awardees.

Teacher quality matters, and through partnerships with our regional school districts and outstanding veteran educators, UW-L School of Education experiences high quality teacher education.

Thank you, Outstanding Educators in the Coulee Region for making the difference!