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GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK



Elizabeth Hartmann, MA '09, former student teacher at Manzanita Elementary, now EARTHHS.

Student Teachers at Professional Development School EARTHHS Explore Eco-Education

As any parent knows, children can be a handful.

But a classroom full of them—each with their own personality; motivations; interests; learning style; coping mechanisms; and level of cognitive development, sensitivity, and security—that is a handful of juggling balls. Only the most skilled teachers are able to keep their eyes on each orb, though the spheres are constantly moving in different directions, at different speeds, and with different trajectories.

GSEP's master of arts in education with teaching credential students become just such teachers, in large part because of their participation as student teachers with Professional Development Schools (PDS). These are partnerships GSEP has established with local learning centers to provide our students insight into the teaching profession, and a forum in which to cultivate their techniques and confidence.

An outstanding example of these premier programs is our relationship with the Environmental Academy for Research Technology and Earth Science (EARTHHS), formerly Manzanita Elementary School. The recently transformed K - 5 public Magnet School promotes interactive, multisensory, discovery-based education with a specific focus on earth sciences and technology. With this transition, GSEP's students will have an even more unique platform on which to develop their teaching capabilities.

"The complexity that is involved in the practice of teaching is considerable," remarked associate professor Dr. Kathy Church, who oversees the professional development program for GSEP at EARTHHS. "Helping student teachers to adequately develop their identity and skills to become extraordinarily committed and effective educators is no small task. It is exhilarating to be involved in a partnership with the innovative thinkers at EARTHHS who are actively engaged in making significant research-based changes."

In the past four years, more than 60 GSEP student teachers attending classes at the Westlake Village Graduate Campus have served at this PDS. The student teachers work with the school for an entire academic year, doing rotations before engaging as teachers alongside master teachers at the school. At this stage, the teacher candidates help prepare and implement lessons, and try various teaching styles and classroom management techniques. In addition, student teachers become versed in gender issues affecting education such as the disproportionate male-to-female ratio of men to women in science, and diversity issues such as English language learning. Research shows that teachers trained in this experiential model are more effective than those trained with traditional methods.

"EARTHS has been built hand-in-hand with Pepperdine University," noted Laura Péwé, EARTHS' PDS coordinator. "This school provides the Westlake cohort of multiple-subject student-teaching candidates with an intensive internship that is rich with collaboration. The hands-on preparation that GSEP students receive here builds on their graduate course work and ultimately cultivates the highest quality teachers."

Jennifer Boone, principal of EARTHS and an ardent supporter of the PDS program, agreed: "I am thrilled to bring such a talented group of teachers together to provide a challenging education to our students." EARTHS, which opened its doors on August 27 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by local educational leaders, school administration, teachers, and parents, has attracted around 500 students that have voluntarily transferred from other learning centers within the Conejo Valley School District.

Using a cross-curricular approach and earth sciences and technology as a unifying theme for exploration, students learn how people depend on and influence the ecosystem, and how their decisions affect the availability of the Earth's vital resources. Innovative courses encourage service learning and environmental stewardship, from recycling to purchasing solar-powered goods. Most distinctively, the newly renovated biology and chemistry lab; the native plant and California regions gardens; and local museums, universities, environmental agencies, businesses, and national parks all act as classrooms.

For example, with the Students Helping Restore Unique Biomes (SHRUB) project, children visit the Santa Monica National Recreation Area once per month throughout the year to assist with the collection of seeds from and planting of native plants. The program operates under the guidance of the National Park Service Rangers, who provide lessons on preserving the native flora and fauna, the impact of invasive species on native plants, geology and water cycles, protecting wildlife, and scientific methods. In February, students go on a three-day camping trip to Death Valley National Park so that they can compare and contrast the two extremely different biomes. "As a student teacher at this site I was given valuable training that qualified me for my future career as an educator," said Elizabeth Hartmann (MA '09) who taught third grade and is now going

on to teach 10th-grade geometry at Animo South Los Angeles Charter School. "EARTHS' new format for teaching and learning will be an even greater benefit to both students and student teachers."

Church summed up the excitement surrounding the launch of EARTHS and the success of the PDS program: "What is happening between our schools is extraordinary, and it is a blessing to have our student teachers, the elementary students, and the administration at EARTHS come together as a community of learners. This wonderful undertaking is education at its best."

For more information on EARTHS, visit: www.conejo.k12.ca.us/earths