CHALLENGING INEQUITIES IN EDUCATION

UPCOMING MEETINGS

ALL-C.U.R.E. MEETINGS HAVE BEEN MOVED TO THURSDAY EVENINGS NEXT SEMESTER!

FEB. 12: 7-8:30
FIREPLACE LOUNGE
COREY UNION
MARCH 18: 7-8:30
EXHIBITION LOUNGE
COREY UNION
APRIL 8: 7-8:30
EXHIBITION LOUNGE
COREY UNION
MENTOR MEETINGS WILL REMAIN ON TUESDAY EVENINGS

FEB. 17: 7-8:30
EXHIBITION LOUNGE
COREY UNION
MARCH 23: 7-8:30
TO BE ANNOUNCED
APRIL 13: 7-8:30
EXHIBITION LOUNGE
COREY UNION

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Oops!!!
In our last issue we introduced Doreen Wade as a Physical Education major, Doreen is actually an Adolescent Social Studies major. We apologize for the error.

CLASSROOM REFLECTIONS BY DOREEN WADE

For the past five weeks I have been completing an observation at Shea Middle School in Syracuse. Shea is on the New York state list of schools that need to improve their test scores within three years. They did not accomplish this goal, so now the state has taken action. This year the school administration is doing what they call "Taking Back the School." One of the things this entails is making the students walk on a certain side of the hallway. The hallways are divided with tape down the middle and the students are supposed to walk on the right side. I do not see this happening. When I am walking in the hallways the students are just running around. A few times I have seen the students "fighting". In my opinion the taped lines in the hall were just a waste of tape: they serve no purpose. Also in the halls they have hall monitors. During class time I see the hall monitors supervising the children who leave to go to the bathroom. They make sure that the students have their passes, but when the students are getting ready to leave or are switching classes, I do not see anyone trying to keep the students under control and getting them out of the school to catch their buses. There always seems to be chaos when there is a large number of students in the hallway.

Overall, my experience at Shea Middle School has been very insightful. It is something that I can take with me and use in my future as an educator.
Let’s take a trip to our past. Remember when we were little children, we would sit and watch Sesame Street for hours on end. We would repeat every letter of the alphabet and never really understand why or what we were saying. The music would chime in and a little song was made out of the alphabet while bright pictures flashed around the letter that we were singing about.

Intent, that’s what we were. Eager to learn to make connections between reading and letters we would sound out words. “Anominal, Animal, A-nim-al, Animal”. Now mom can’t act like she doesn’t understand you when you ask for animal crackers at dinner time. This went on for some time, you would listen to words and sound them out trying to make your mouth form the words on the television screen or the words on the street sign. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months but you became better and better.

Time to go to school. At school everyone seemed to be learning so quickly. At reading time little Raul from El Salvador would have such a hard time reading. You see, English was his second language and he tried really hard to keep up but he struggled. Tyrone would sit in the back and write and recite rap lyrics from his writing journal. He would beat on the desk and say “Yo, Yo, Yo” that’s pretty much all I got from Tyrone. I mean, he was smart and he spoke Ebonics fluently and I had a hard time understanding what he was talking about. But all the same he was a great reader and writer.

Every day during class time my teacher would call us all to the middle of the room so that she could read the story for the day. We would all sit on the floor as she read the book to us. I loved to sit there and just listen and imagine that I was the person in the story. The teacher would frequently ask Jason to get up and act out what was happening in the book. He was really animated. Jason loved doing hands-on things that got him involved. Every time the teacher read a book little Janice would jump up and say she loved pictures.

Remember class, “reading is fundamental.” Independent reading is what our teacher called it. I was in middle school now and the teacher tried to get us to be more independent, she told us to read silently for 20 minutes and then write in our journal about what we read and our reaction to the reading. We were reading “The Muddy Road to Glory” which coincided with our history lesson on the Civil War. It was like the best of both worlds because now it was easier to understand the material, it wasn’t all factual information being shoved in our faces, we could actually picture what was going on during the time period because of the story we were reading.

As an avid reader and writer, I feel that the ability to read and write is extremely important and also entertaining. If the ability to read and write were taken away from me, I would work as long as it took to get it back into my life. Reading is one of the most basic and most important abilities that a person can have. The process of deciphering letters into words and then into phrases is used constantly. When glancing around a room, many words can usually be found and the brain immediately tells the person what these words are. Road signs, tee-shirts, and store fronts all have words on them. All these words, which a reader basically takes for granted, would be nothing but strange symbols without this great ability. Writing is just as important…If a person wanted a large group of people to get an announcement over a long period of time, it would be rather wasteful to stand in one place shouting the words. Instead, the written language is used to make some sort of sign telling people what it is that they should know. All of the important things that come from reading would not be possible if writing was not also involved. The two processes go together both feeding off of the other. Reading and writing are possibly the most important abilities that a thinking person can have.

Could I ever be considered a great reader? This was the question I asked myself daily. I loved reading. The thought of taking my mind to far away places and learning all types of information that now, at the present moment, may not help me but in time will make me one of the intellectual elite among my peers. Yes, that is what I will do. I will read until my eyes are bloodshot red, I will read until I feel like I have the weight of the world resting on my eyelids, I will read until words are a jumbled group of black blotsches. And when I cannot read any further, I will write. I will write until my hands are arthritic, I will write until I cannot feel the pen anymore, I will write as if the sentence will never end, I will write until the pen runs out of ink and I run out of words, until I run out of letters, until a new alphabet is created. And when I cannot write or read anymore I will teach.

Young learners become old learners if we should be so lucky. You see learning never stops. A person is never too old to learn and never too young to be taught. Reading and writing are processes of development. The more you practice the easier it becomes. When we were younger it was Sesame Street, now it’s 500 page novels and autobiographies. Did you ever think that you would make it this far? Neither did I.
ALUMNI UPDATE: NIKKI PRATER

Nikki Prater graduated from SUNY Cortland and the C.U.R.E. program in 2001. She is now in her second year of teaching fourth grade at C.S. 102 in the Bronx.

Nikki loves the school where she is teaching. She describes it as “warm, friendly and child centered. It's a school where learning is prevalent, C.S. 102 is a school where children come first.”

Nikki is excited about teaching. She says “there are so many rewards... (for example), seeing the children grow academically and personally.” She says, “it's interesting when you teach them life lessons and you hear them incorporate what you've taught them in their daily lives.” “Or,” she says, “one simple reward is when a child wants to give you a hug or hold your hand.”

Nikki was surprised at how demanding she finds teaching. “It looked so easy from the outside,” she says, “it’s very rewarding, but there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work that teachers do...”. Nikki is working long hours. She is in school Monday to Friday 8:20 to 2:40, plus she substitutes at the after-school program and works Saturdays from 9:00 to 12:00 at the “Saturday Academy,” a program that prepares fourth graders for the state E.L.A. and math exams.

But she feels prepared for the work she does. “I feel prepared because I love what I do...sometimes the demands of the profession can be a bit overwhelming. You have to remember that you are here for the children. They are the ones that matter in the end..., they are the reason I wake up every morning... even on Saturdays!”

She says one of her biggest challenges has been “to help children that are far below grade level standards achieve and exceed fourth grade standards. Luckily we have very supportive parents …communication is the key!”

SUMMER IN THE CITY PROGRAM: GET READY FOR 2004

On November 5th, 2003, four CURE students presented in the Sandwich Seminar “Summer in the City: SUNY Cortland students take the lead!” The presenters were David Killmore, Christina McCollough, Maria Fuentes, and Zenobia Perrin.

John Shirley, director of Career Services, gave an overview and provided information about the program. Afterwards, the students shared their experiences teaching in the inner city schools in NY City. They did an excellent job communicating their impressions and providing suggestions for potential participants of the program.

The students found the Summer in the City program to be a very positive experience. Everyone was exposed to diversity in their experience whether it was teaching to Latino students, Polish or Croatian immigrants, African American students, or students from Jamaica. Participants had to help students who did not speak English and who had life experiences different from their own. In addition, spending time in New York City was seen as an educational and exciting opportunity.

If you are interested in learning more about the program and how to apply for the Summer 2004 session, please contact John Shirley, VH B-5, x4715 or email him at JohnS@em.cortland.edu or visit www.teachny.com.

C.U.R.E. QUIZ

TEST YOURSELF ON RECENT URBAN EDUCATION NEWS

Q1. How many students in the U.S. school system speak English poorly or not at all?
Q2. How much time does “No Child Left Behind” give schools to bring students who speak NO English to fluency?
Q3. Across the U.S., how many people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are out of school are also out of work?
C.U.R.E. PROFILE: MIKE WITKOWICH

Mike Witkowich from Yorktown Heights, NY is a junior, who is majoring in Adolescent Social Studies and History. He knew he wanted to become a teacher since high school, where he learned about SUNY Cortland.

Through C.U.R.E. he has been “alerted to inequalities in education and high need schools. C.U.R.E. opened my eyes to all of that and I want to make a difference to inner city kids.”

Mike is half Czech and half Puerto Rican. Until he came to C.U.R.E., he thought he was 100% American, but now he has more respect for both his cultures. He says he has learned more about his ethnicity through C.U.R.E.

In the future, Mike sees himself teaching in a high-need urban school preferably in the Bronx or Queens. What does he do when he is not studying? Mike is a sports fan who likes to play basketball and football. Although he is not homesick, Mike says he misses his mom’s home cooking!

C.U.R.E. QUIZ ANSWERS

Q1. According to a NY Times article written by Sam Dillon on November 5, 2003, “About 5.5 million students, 10 percent of public school enrollment, speak English poorly or not at all.”
Q2. Three years. Students who have attended school in the U.S. for three years are required to take standardized tests.
Q3. According to an article in the NY Times on Oct. 20, 2003 by Bob Herbert, about 5.5 million.

www.cortland.edu/cure