

Educators' influence and impact travel well beyond classroom door

Classroom, community and global connections

In both undergraduate and graduate programs in the School of Education, Alverno's ability-based curriculum ensures that students are prepared as professionals and as citizens. In teacher education, effective citizenship is an integral part of students' examining the place of schools in society, developing their teacher/administrator role as a member of an institution that impacts society, and finding their power to influence others for the common good. A theme for the School of Education's work with this ability might be "beyond the classroom door," because our expectation is that our graduates will see their role as making connections between their classroom and the whole school, the local community and the wider world.

The four levels of the effective citizenship ability scaffold undergraduate student development through self awareness, information gathering, judgment and community involvement. In the beginning levels of the effective citizenship ability, students develop self-assessment skills related to their awareness and involvement in various "communities" with which they engage. They may draw upon articles about local and global issues to gather information about issues of concern and then apply course concepts to examine the issues further.

As students move through the curriculum, they begin to work within both organizations and community settings to hone their effective citizenship skills. For example, in the elementary education social studies

methods course, a major assignment is to plan a field trip to a community-based organization. Students explore local sites like the Hunger Coalition, Hope House, Black History Museum, among others, to learn the roles of organizations in the community and how to evaluate ways that organizations achieve common goals. At the same time, they raise questions about what it means to learn to be a teacher in a pluralistic society and they probe the ways that teachers assist their students to develop a sense of responsibility for others in the community.

Service learning is also a key aspect of building the effective citizenship ability. In the middle school methods class students engage in service learning as a way of moving from judgment to action. They design a service learning project for early adolescent students, selecting community-based organizations to engage these learners in meaningful ways. As with all service-learning projects, the linking of service (what students actually do) and learning (what they take away from the experience) is mediated by conversation and reflection on how these organizations contribute to the needs of the local community.

Alverno education graduates leave the program ready to be full participants in making schools responsible for supporting learner development, as described by standard 10 of the Wisconsin teacher standards: The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents and

“Alverno education graduates leave the program ready to be full participants in making schools responsible for supporting learner development.”

continued on page 18

continued from page 17

agencies in the larger community to support pupil learning and well-being and who acts with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.

The Master of Arts in Education program embraces John Dewey's charge to see education as a moral responsibility of a democratic society. Across specializations in the graduate program for K-12 teachers, graduate students focus on building skills of conceptualization and communication that hone their awareness of the role of schools and teachers in a diverse society.

They examine their own school contexts using varied organizational development frameworks and set goals for how they can exercise leadership as a teacher or administrator in support of communities of learners and the wider community. They develop a keen sense of moral purpose that marks their commitment to education as a "common good" in our society.

The School of Education supports effective citizenship more broadly through

several projects that develop teachers and administrators as leaders of learning communities, working with area districts. The Southeastern Wisconsin Assessment Collaborative (SEWAC), which celebrates 10 years this spring, provides a year-long professional development program focused on building strong curriculum and assessment practice. At its heart is the development of strong teams of teachers and administrators who go back to their school buildings and districts with renewed energy to support learners through effective educational practice. These participants, too, explore their own organizations and create plans to work with both the supports and challenges embedded in those organizations.

The Leadership Academy in Character Education (LACE) is a new venture begun in January 2010, in collaboration with a long-standing program in St. Louis. Thirty-three persons, some as individuals and some as teams from schools or other organizations, come to Alverno once a month to participate in seminars and to share their work on their

plans for transforming their organizations into "schools of character" that can have a positive long-term impact on students' lives.

All of these efforts to go "beyond the classroom door" point to the School of Education's deep awareness of the moral responsibility we hold as teacher educators and as partners with K-12 schools in making a difference through democratic education.



Mary Diez is a School Sister of St. Francis, a 1967 Alverno alumna, professor of Education, dean of Graduate Studies and director of the Master of Arts program. She is the board chair at Carmen

High School of Science & Technology.



U.S. Secretary of Education cites Alverno as a 'shining star'

In a speech at Teachers College of Columbia University last October in which U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan criticized teacher education programs for doing an inadequate job preparing teachers for the classroom, he singled out Alverno College as a shining star; a school that does an exemplary job in training and preparing teachers for the classroom.

According to his prepared remarks, Duncan said, "Alverno College, a Catholic women's college in Milwaukee, requires a rigorous field experience in the public schools and has faculty and

local principals assess videotapes of student teachers. Eighty-five percent of Alverno graduates are still in the classroom five years after graduation, an extremely high retention rate."

In his speech, Duncan cited a handful of other schools — large universities, Ivy League schools and liberal art colleges — noting that "it doesn't take an elite university and a big endowment to create a good teacher education program."

He stressed the elements of strong teacher preparation programs are ones that are "coherent, up-to-date, research-based and

provide students with subject mastery... And these programs have a shared vision of what constitutes good teaching and best practices — including a single-minded focus on improving student learning and using data to inform instruction."

Duncan said many of the nation's 1,450 schools, colleges and departments of education are doing "a mediocre job" of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st century classroom. He said teacher preparation programs are "in need of evolutionary change — not evolutionary tinkering."