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maximizing human potential



UAB's interests as a research university aren't confined to complex computer models or gene-therapy experiments. Research has many faces, and in the School of Education, the faces are often those of small children—children experiencing the delight and wonder of successfully reading a book or solving a problem.

"The proper role of a research university is to design and implement programs based on current thinking and research, not just to serve as a teacher factory," says Michael J. Froning, Ed.D., dean of the UAB School of Education. "We have a responsibility to the community and to the nation to be sure that our programs are based on current and active research. We not only have to know what other people are doing around the country, we have to be doing it ourselves."

School of Ed faculty conduct research in all levels of education, but they realize efforts to reach older children can be severely limited if basic skills in key subject areas are not ingrained early on. For that reason, the school has made a commitment to cutting-edge research aimed at creating a solid educational foundation for young children.

GETTING STARTED

It's 10:15 a.m. at Westhills Primary School in Bessemer—time for reading the "Big Book." An eager group of children gathers around teacher Pam Bond, who skillfully guides a discussion of the "sound of the day"—the letter "M." Bond goes through the book she holds, asking children to name objects and colors they might see in a food market. Although they are only three or four years old, the youngsters are already learning some reading basics.

Westhills is one of nine locations for Early Reading First, a program providing a reading groundwork to children before they enter school. The program strives to make learning enjoyable through such materials as large-format books, language games, music, and books on tape.

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Research-Based Approaches to Education Basics



"The premise is that if you provide young children and their teachers with the kinds of learning materials and the rich language and literacy experiences they need, they won't have as many problems learning to read and write when they enter public schools," says Kathleen Martin, Ph.D., assistant professor of education and principal investigator for the ERF grant. The project will follow children in nine "treatment" groups through kindergarten and first grade to see if students receiving reading enrichment services do better in school than those who don't. "What we think we'll find is that children receiving these enrichment services will score higher in such areas as language, vocabulary, and concepts about print and writing," Martin says.

The program in Bessemer is funded by a \$2.5-million, three-year grant under the No Child Left Behind Act—one of only 30 such preschool projects in the nation. Martin is principal investigator for the program. Kay Emfinger, Ph.D., assistant professor of education, is the project director. Their team includes teachers, support personnel, UAB graduate students, and volunteers. In addition to the nine present Early Reading First classrooms in day-care centers, home centers, and schools, 10 more Head Start classrooms will be included next fall.

FILLING HOLES

One research project that pointed the way to Early Reading First is Ready to Learn in School, a study of some 400 preschool programs in Birmingham-area day-care centers, home daycares, Head Start, and Even Start facilities. The Mayer Electric Foundation, headed by Charles Collat, provided a \$300,000 grant to fund the study.

"The main goal of the project was to find holes in early childhood-education programs and to identify ways of solving problems," says Jerry Aldridge, Ed.D., professor of education and director of the project. "The old saying about an ounce of prevention holds true for learning. And the cost factor is much less if we can reach children early.

“What we’ve found is that all preschools need to be accredited [presently only 50 are accredited in the Birmingham area], and that there’s a need for more parent education and for family-literacy centers. We’re hoping to receive a grant that provides training for parents and other caregivers who have limited educations.”

Kathleen Martin is state coordinator for another reading program called Reading Recovery, which provides one-on-one tutoring for first graders who are having difficulties learning to read and write. Approximately 1,000 Alabama schoolchildren participate in Reading Recovery, receiving at least 30 minutes of special help daily.

Individual school districts from Huntsville to Ozark, including several in the Birmingham area, are funding the program. “Our goal is to dramatically reduce the number of first-graders with reading problems,” Martin says. “We’ve found that about 70 percent of students receiving tutoring have come up to their classroom average in 12 to 20 weeks.”

TAKING INITIATIVE

A program with much wider scope is the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), which is aimed at improving reading instruction and achieving 100-percent literacy in Alabama’s public schools. Presently some 400 Alabama public schools are participating in this program, which includes two weeks of summer training for teachers.

“There’s a lot of assessment in the Alabama Reading Initiative,” says Maryann Manning, Ed.D., professor of education. Manning participated in the development of the program, along with fellow faculty members Gypsy Abbott, Ph.D., and Lynn Kirkland, Ed.D. Manning says that assessing students’ abilities from the beginning enables teachers to mold their approaches to fit students’ needs.

The jury is still out on the effectiveness of the ARI. “Results vary on different tests,” Manning says. “We’re just testing more. One problem is that because Alabama is a poor state, we have children who lack experiences and understanding of the world. There are people who say it doesn’t matter. But those are people who have never taught school.”

This summer, Manning also represented the School of Education in the Red Mountain Writing Project, co-sponsored by the School of Arts and Humanities. This institute attracted outstanding teachers nominated by participating schools. It was one of numerous workshops held nationwide through the National

Writing Project, which brings together teachers to focus on the importance of writing. Teachers selected for the Red Mountain Writing Project also received a \$1,100 stipend. This covers tuition for up to six credit hours of instruction in English or in the curriculum and instruction department at UAB.

CRUNCHING NUMBERS

While much of their research emphasis is on language, School of Education faculty members also are working on improved ways to teach mathematics and science. Charles Calhoun, Ph.D., associate professor and chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, is working under a National Science Foundation grant to train math teachers in the Birmingham school system. The five-year grant, initiated by UAB’s Dr. Louis Dale in 2000, uses a curriculum developed by the University of Chicago.

Calhoun says that with this process, called Everyday Mathematics, students don’t use conventional textbooks. “It’s basically a problem-solving curriculum,” he explains. “You start with a problem, and the goal is for students to find solutions. As they solve problems, they learn math skills. They have disposable workbooks containing games or activities that they use for practice. Since Birmingham schools started using this approach, student scores in math have either stayed the same or improved.”

“Many elementary teachers don’t have strong backgrounds in math,” he adds. “I’ve found that those who are conscientious and hard-working tend to embrace the problem-solving approach and begin to understand math in a different way.”

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE

In the sciences, Associate Professor David Radford, Ph.D., uses research based on the philosophy of constructivism. “Basically,” he says, “this is the idea that every student has to construct his or her own knowledge, based on both new information and prior experience. So we develop activities that give everyone the same common prior experience. This means we start with a hands-on activity, not worrying about concepts. Then we teach concepts and vocabulary. Then students apply what they’ve learned.”

For example, Radford says, each class member may be given one battery, a piece of wire, and a light bulb and told their assignment is to get the bulb to light. Once they’ve accomplished this, they learn the principles that enabled them to construct a complete circuit.

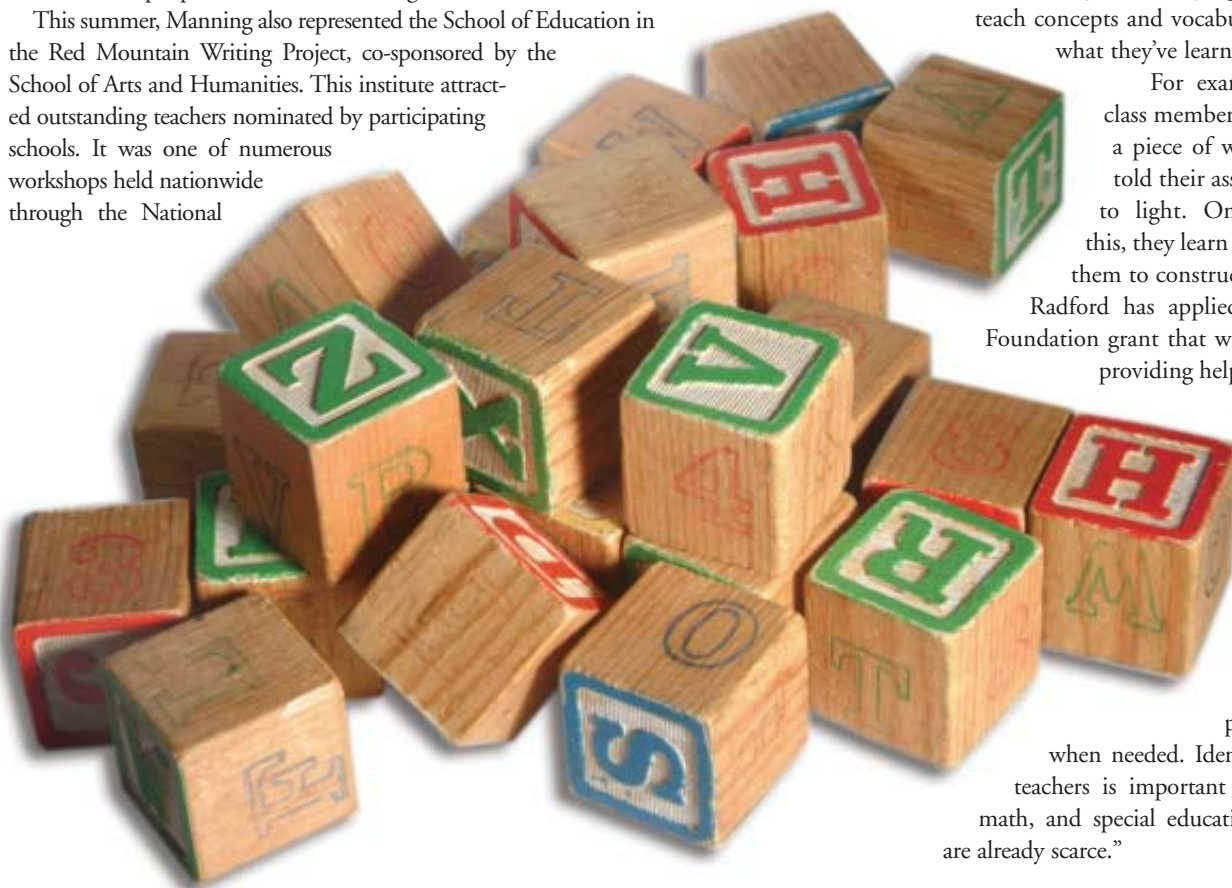
Radford has applied for a National Science Foundation grant that will test various methods of providing help to beginning teachers. “A

mentor, perhaps a retired teacher, will be assigned to one group in the study,” Radford says.

“A second group will have a mentor assigned by the school in which the new teacher works.

The third model will be what most schools do—provide a buddy to help

when needed. Identifying ways to assist new teachers is important in fields such as science, math, and special education—fields where teachers are already scarce.”



Joe Burns, Ed.D., associate professor of education, also is working on cutting-edge approaches to teaching science. He works with classroom teachers through the Alabama Hands-On Activity Science Program (ALAHASP) for grades K-6. "Using modular or kit-based science materials, students spend time exploring and investigating key science concepts,"

Burns says. "Modules deal with such subjects as electricity, balance and motion, solids and liquids, and life cycles in an in-depth fashion. The modules also are inquiry-based. That is, children explore, formulate questions, and find answers."

One example of this approach is a balance-and-motion module, which begins with students balancing objects on their fingers, then balancing an assortment of objects on string or fishing line. "In working through this module, youngsters learn a great deal about stable positions, counterweight, center of gravity, and other principles," Burns says. "But these terms don't enter the picture until we've had a great deal of exploratory experience. We also encourage kids to keep logs or journals recording their findings."

ALAHASP provides professional development, rather than course credit, to classroom teachers. Burns,



Charles Calhoun is working under a National Science Foundation grant to train math teachers in the Birmingham school system.

who succeeded Associate Professor Emeritus Steve Underwood as project director, says that the program has been used to train 6,500 teachers representing 43 school districts. Joan Dawson is education director and Beverly Radford program manager for ALAHASP, which receives most of its funding from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, along with support from Honda and other businesses.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

In English as a Second Language (ESL) graduate courses, the students themselves are spearheading an "action research" approach to resolving problems either individually or in teams.

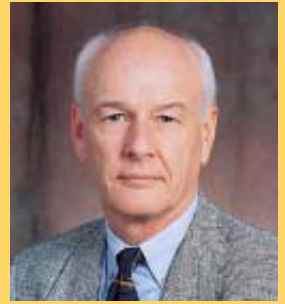
"ESL teachers are learning they don't have to wait on a group of university researchers," says Julia Austin, Ph.D., director of educational services in the Graduate School. "Problem-solving is something they can develop and use long after they finish coursework here. For instance, Laura Gober, who teaches in Shelby County, created homework kits to give to parents of new ESL students enrolling in school. An Alexander City teacher, Alice Owens, developed a series of little mini-workshops for third to fifth graders on learning strategies. The concept worked so well that it was expanded to include other students. Also, some teachers have incorporated learning strategies into their classroom material."

Austin says that action research has a broad scope, ranging from in-service training for teachers to materials for parents. "We don't limit the research, except that we ask it to address problems they have in teaching or that exist in the system," Austin says.

Whether it's taking place in a preschool classroom or a middle-school science lab, School of Education-sponsored research is assisting schools and teachers throughout the state. This is especially important in times of budget cuts, says Froning.

"Whatever the situation, teachers have to teach whoever shows up," he comments. "We don't get to choose the resources that the community brings to the situation. What we can do for school systems is to help them do the best job they can do."

Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Teachers



In a recent study done by the LSU Public Policy Research Laboratory, respondents were asked, "What three issues would concern you most if your son or daughter wanted to become a schoolteacher?"

The results were not too surprising—67 percent listed pay, wages, and benefits in their top three; 37 percent chose safety, violence, and crime; while 18 percent and 17 percent, respectively, chose the related items of lack of respect/physical conditions and discipline/student behavior. Because people could name three items, the percents add to more than 100 percent.

As a dean these figures do not surprise me, but they very much frighten me.

Where will the next generation find the motivation and inspiration to teach when their parents have such negative views of the profession? At times in my more than 35 years in the classroom, each item on that list was a serious personal issue for me. I never made the kind of money I thought I deserved. Virtually every year I taught significant numbers of students affected by violence and crime, and many times I saw violence in my schools. I wish I had a nickel for every time I was disrespected by a student or parent. I wish my students had been able to learn during the thousands of minutes I spent correcting a classmate's behavior.

But, you know, if I were starting over, I'd become a teacher in a minute. There is no other profession so close to that most basic human need—the need to understand the world we see in front of us. There is rubber meeting road in every classroom in the country. No matter what bureaucratic webs are spun around us (read NCLB) as teachers, we still are able to preside over miracles every day.

And every so often, the stars align. The kids all decide to behave and pay attention at the same time, they give explicit permission to be taught, they vigorously pursue the plan the teacher has devised, they demonstrate their knowledge...and they learn. It is heaven on those days. There's no job like it.

And that, mama, is why you should always encourage your children to grow up and teach.

Viewpoint: Bias and Sensitivity Panels

The Homogenization of P-12 Textbooks

By Cecilia M. Pierce, Ed.D.

In her 2003 book, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*, Diane Ravitch exposes the secret role of bias and sensitivity panels in the publication of textbooks and standardized tests that become part of the curriculum in P-12 schools throughout our nation. Bias and sensitivity panels review books and standardized tests and remove or change words, graphic depictions, or pictures that might be considered controversial or offensive. This process can be illustrated in the changing of “Founding Fathers,” as in the “Founding Fathers of the Constitution” (who by the way were all men) to “Framers of the Constitution” in an attempt to maintain a gender-neutral vocabulary in American history books.

Having been a young adult in the 1960s, I am acutely aware of the role language plays in the discrimination of various factions of our citizenry. As a result of my experiences, I am a champion of political correctness, and I applaud the fact that today we are more sensitive to groups that were previously not often considered. However, the current over-the-top operations of bias and sensitivity panels represents political correctness run amok.

Textbook publishers, in their desire to sell books, have sold out to extremist groups on both sides of the political spectrum. Pressure groups from the extreme right want books to portray an idealized past while pressure groups from the extreme left want books to portray an idealized future. As a result, books are being published that are banal, boring, and bordering on historically inaccurate. Instead of helping students to develop the skills to deal with situations involving discrimination, current homogenized textbooks represent an idealized world where no one is ever offended. Achievements of women and minorities get plenty of attention, as they should, but it is often at the expense of other historic events and achievements. The histories of foreign cultures are examined in detail, but significant conflicts and societal practices are either glossed over or are simply not mentioned at all.

The result of all this is textbooks that employ language and graphic depictions largely void of any meaning, which reduces the number of “teachable

moments” that certain words and pictures can evoke in the classroom. Value-laden words provide an opportunity for teachers to teach students about bias and discrimination. However, by using textbooks without such language, teachers find themselves teaching in order not to offend rather than to promulgate learning.

The real losers in this political tug-of-war are the children who will be responsible for our future.

Cecilia Pierce is an associate professor in the School of Education.



“I began this quest with a strong belief that schools are supposed to lay a foundation for love of literature by exposing children incrementally, based on age appropriateness, to the best writings of our common language, and to the extent possible, to the best writings from other cultures. There are so many superb novels, short stories, poems, plays, and essays to choose from that it is impossible for any student to read them all. But this fact makes it all the more important that teachers make the effort to identify the writers and works that will broaden their students’ horizons beyond their own immediate circumstances and reveal to them a world of meanings far beyond their own experiences.”

Diane Ravitch – The Language Police

Conversation Without Confrontation

Teaching Good Literature Doesn't Have to be Controversial

By Cindy Adams

Throughout my 25-year career as a high-school teacher, I have operated under the firm conviction that parents are ultimately responsible for the education of their children and that school systems are in place to assist in that endeavor. Teachers bring their training, expertise, and experience to the effort, but a teacher is still bound by the values of the community.

Textbooks and testing materials that have been bowdlerized by bias and sensitivity panels might make proper, illuminating instruction more difficult, but it is still the teacher's responsibility to challenge students and provide them with as broad an education as possible while preparing them for experiences they will encounter later in life, whether that be in college or in the workforce.

As an English instructor teaching mostly college-bound juniors and seniors, I have a responsibility to see that my students are exposed to a wide variety of literature. From classics to contemporary works, ancient texts to late 20th-century American literature, students need to have at least some familiarity with a seemingly endless variety of styles, perspectives, and schools of thought by the time they enter college English classes.

When trying to select literature from such a vast spectrum of notable works, inevitably some choices will contain language or subject matter some will find objectionable.

When that happens, the teacher's situation can be awkward, but it doesn't have to be. The teacher apparently believes there is educational value in the assigned piece, but is it really beneficial to quibble or even to reason with a parent while the child's education hangs in the balance? In my opinion, it is not, since, as I said before, the parent is ultimately responsible for the child's education. How, then, do teachers fulfill their mission to prepare their students with a full background of literature, when nearly every reading list contains works that have, at some point or another, been banned because of objectionable material?

The reaction from many educators has been to rebel against what they deem censorship—to uphold classics that some have

identified as insensitive and to vouch for contemporary works that include frank discussions of violence and sexual matters in addition to their literary merit. But even if teachers were successful and were given *carte blanche* to assign whatever they wished over the objections of the community, there would still be no way for a class to study every worthy work of literature within a given school year—or even within four-straight school years.

The answer, in my opinion, is to involve the parents in the planning of the curriculum from the very beginning. A student should never bring home a book or assignment that comes as a surprise to his or her parents. I have been lucky over the years in that I have always had the privilege of teaching in schools that I would want my kids to attend. Those have most often been in communities containing a large number of well-educated parents, so many of the books I assign are books the parents have read themselves. But even if I taught in a different system with different community values, I still think my approach would work, because it makes the parents a part of the process. If they know ahead of time what their children are going to be exposed to, they are prepared to discuss it with them and participate in the experience the piece of literature offers the students.

What happens if that approach fails and the parent still objects to the assignment? Easy. Just assign an alternate book or selection. If the parent has been informed of the curriculum from the beginning, there should be plenty of time for them to even assist in picking from a list of alternate choices. For example, a parent once asked that a student of mine not be assigned *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, so we agreed to let that student read Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man*

and the Sea instead. Both are excellent novels of similar length by 20th-century writers.

As a parent, I understand the need to monitor what children are being taught. As students progress through high school and begin reading more contemporary works, objectionable images and language are going to become more prevalent. The solution does not lie in censorship and the banning of books and images, but neither does it lie in an education system that aggressively enforces the teaching of material that is offensive to the community it serves. One of the great effects of literature is that it often exposes the reader to ideas, situations, or insights that were previously foreign or unknown. When controversy arises from that, I believe our goal as teachers should be to facilitate discussion while minimizing confrontation.

Cindy Adams is an English teacher at Vestavia Hills High School. She received her master's degree from the School of Education in December 2003 and is currently an EDS candidate.



Myth or Reality: *Is There Room in a Modern Student's Life for Homework?*

How much homework is too much?

The answer may depend on whom you ask. Students and teachers will almost always have conflicting views on the subject, but parents have also been known to complain that their students are overworked—especially in the lower levels of elementary school. Several studies have been made over the years but have produced conflicting results.

Complaints or no complaints, the fact is that in many subjects, planning, assigning, and grading homework assignments is a very big part of teaching that subject correctly.

With that in mind, School of Education professor Tommy Smith, Ed.D., recently sat down with *Education Outlook* to discuss proper strategies for administering homework assignments. Smith taught math in high school for six years before becoming an associate professor in the School of Education, where he has worked the past 15 years.



School of Education Professor Tommy Smith says teachers must be trained for both the ideals and the realities when it comes to assigning homework.

Outlook: There is a wide range of activities that could conceivably fall under the category of homework—practicing math problems, memorizing vocabulary, or just reading a book. So to start, could you define exactly what is meant by homework?

TS: I think homework is anything that supplements instruction that a teacher gives during a normal class period. It could be extra projects or daily assignments giving practice on what has already been taught. My area is mathematics, and that is a subject, especially at the high-school level, where homework is usually expected every day simply because of the fact that there is a certain amount of practice that needs to be done on each topic. You can't get all that practice done to a level of proficiency within a 50-minute class period.

Outlook: So in math, homework is reinforcing what has been taught, rather than introducing new material.

TS: Ideally, yes. Schools that are on the block schedule have the advantage of having more time in class each day, but they only have half a year to complete an entire course. So in that respect, kids should get twice as much homework as they normally would to cover the same amount of material. That doesn't seem to be the practice for many of the teachers I see. They still give the same amount of homework as they did when they had the entire year.

Outlook: Why do you think that is?

TS: Because the kids won't do it. In fact, the complaint from many teachers is that students don't do their homework already, so doubling the amount would just mean that they're *not* doing twice as much. And anyway, to double the amount is probably an unreasonable expectation.

Outlook: If kept at a reasonable, manageable level, how effective is homework at improving achievement?

TS: It varies depending on the development of the student. Studies have shown that at the early elementary grades, there isn't any difference between

the kids who have homework and the kids who don't. In middle school there is a little bit of an advantage in achievement for kids who have homework versus those who don't. High school, there is a fairly good correlation between achievement and homework, so the more homework a student does, the more likely their scores will be better. So high-school teachers more so than others are probably more conscientious about assigning homework and having higher expectations.

Outlook: A lot of the complaints about children having too much homework come from parents of young elementary school kids. If studies show that homework doesn't make a big difference in achievement at that age, wouldn't that suggest that the parents are right and teachers should not assign homework at that age?

TS: Not necessarily. I think part of the reason for at least giving minimal homework assignments is to begin building a routine in students, teaching them that this is something that needs to be done as a part of their schooling. You can't go through six years of schooling without doing any homework and then all of a sudden start assigning it and expecting it to be done. So I would say giving homework in early grades is important because it indoctrinates the students into that process, even if there aren't immediate results in terms of achievement at that level.

Outlook: At levels where homework is believed to be directly related to achievement, do you instruct future teachers to evaluate and grade homework, or are a student's homework habits evident in their test scores?

TS: If you make an assignment, I do believe it's important to follow through with the student, and giving a zero for an assignment that isn't completed isn't enough. Students need to understand that all the assigned work is connected to their long-term achievement in the class; parents need to be brought into the situation if there is a problem so that they can understand the purpose of the assignments and help the teachers to make sure the student is doing his or her part. For students that work, I sympathize, but the idea of learning everything in a subject within a 50-minute per day class period is unrealistic. So productivity has to somehow be achieved outside a class. Having said that, I don't think homework should be graded as much

Five Questions

Julie Godfrey



As both a teacher and a parent, Julie Godfrey knows the challenge of fitting homework into the lives of modern students.

as it should be expected to be completed. Doing homework should be an attempt at something, whether successful or not. It gives the teacher an idea of what that student can and can't do so it informs the pace of their teaching as well as gives them an idea of students' individual capabilities.

Another thing I teach is that homework should never be used as punishment. Giving kids extra homework as punishment may cause them to dislike the subject even more.

Outlook: You mentioned a student who works after school. While completing a math assignment after work might not be too much to ask, how do you answer parents' complaints that a child has daily homework in addition to homework and projects in other subjects. Tackling math exercises while completing research papers, reading assignments, and foreign language homework might be a tall order.

TS: Teachers need to be sensitive to that, but I think that is partly the school's responsibility as well. I see it going on more in middle schools where there is an effort by the school to coordinate so that certain days are set aside for tests in math and another is designated for an English test or quiz. If a math teacher assigns homework, the English teacher gives a project, and the history teacher makes a research assignment, there is no question that a student could be overwhelmed, and the homework could be detrimental to that student learning. Of course, if a student puts off working on a six-week term-paper assignment until the last week, it's not necessarily the math teacher's fault for giving daily assignments that week.

Outlook: Given all that we've discussed, what was your reaction to the recent studies, such as the one done last year by the Brookings Institute, that say students don't spend any more time on daily homework than they have in past decades?

TS: It doesn't surprise me. Based on my own experience, I think more students are working after school than they used to, and they are involved in more after-school activities. So there is less and less time for homework. I also think the influence of Alabama's "four by four" plan—where you have to get four years of a subject in all four years of high school—has increased the number of courses students take in those years.

Outlook: How does a teacher cover the material if he knows students with full after-school schedules have a limit to how much homework they can do?

TS: In preparing teachers, we have to acquaint them with the realities of school as well as the ideal. Ideally, we would like for students to do their homework every night—maybe an hour of math, an hour of science, and so forth—but that's unrealistic. We have to teach them to set realistic expectations, and we have to teach them how to coordinate with other teachers, to look at the overall academic program. That might be pushing it, but we have to look at the overall academic goals for the student while taking into consideration the student's personal environment, whether that be work, extracurricular activities, or the individual family situation.

Julie Godfrey is a 1993 graduate of the UAB School of Education and is currently completing work toward a master's degree. For the past six years she has taught business education courses, the past three years for Oak Mountain High School, and is the parent of two elementary-school students.

Q. *The subjects you teach seem to be mostly elective-type classes. As such, do you have opportunities to give homework assignments?*

A: I have opportunities but rarely do so because students don't always have access to a computer at home or they don't have access to software we are using. I also take into account the amount of homework they have in their core classes. We do daily work in class, and we do projects, but the only time I give homework is when students are behind or are working on a long-term project. For example, when students do their career project, they are required to interview someone from outside the school. So that involves a little bit of homework.

Q. *When you plan a long-term assignment, what factors do you take into consideration?*

A: Most of the students here already have a good bit of daily homework for many of their core classes. Since all but one of the courses I teach are considered electives, I try to allow plenty of time if there is any outside work. Homework for my classes should never be done at the expense of their other assignments.

Q. *What do you make of the recent studies that have concluded students are not spending more time on homework, compared to past decades?*

Q: I was surprised by the statement that it was less. My gut reaction would have been that it was probably the same or a little bit more. I have read where other studies have shown that teachers do start assigning homework to kids at an earlier age. Another thing is that, while the amount of homework may be the same, a typical family's lifestyle is very different. I think even if it is the same, it seems like more. There is so much to do, good or bad, so there is less time outside of school to get things done.

Q. *As a parent, what is the homework routine in your home?*

A: I have a son in second grade and a daughter in fifth grade, so they have reading every night, and then my son always has a math sheet and always has spelling work to do. My daughter has a little broader workload because she has more subjects and more involved bring-home kind of work. So hers changes up a bit, depending on what test she has that week.

Q. *Do you think they receive too much work for their age?*

A: For us, it has been manageable. Even though I bring work home, I probably get home earlier than the average working mom, so our children are able to start sooner. Our children know that schoolwork is a high priority. I want them to understand that now so that they develop good habits for when they get older.

Inquiry

STUDY TARGETS WEIGHT-LOSS CYCLE

Participants Add Weight Training to Aerobic Workouts to Keep Pounds Off



Gary Hunter says it takes more than dieting for most to sustain weight loss.

For many people, losing weight is easy. Unfortunately, gaining it back is even easier.

It's no secret that exercise is an important part of shedding pounds and keeping them off. But while most dieters focus on aerobic exercises such as walking, running, and cycling, UAB researchers are looking into weight-resistance training as a possible key to maintaining that ideal weight.

UAB School of Education professor Gary Hunter, Ph.D., is principal investigator on the five-year project, which is being funded by the National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases. More than 20 years of research led to the study, which is designed to determine what effects weight-resistance training has on metabolism and long-term weight control. Already more than 250 pieces have been published concerning metabolic factors that predispose individuals to obesity and the effects of exercise training on metabolism and body composition, adding to the growing body of evidence that shows that exercise is a key to weight loss and maintenance.

“Our previous work has helped to establish what already was pretty well accepted,” says Hunter. “In fact, one of our most recent studies comparing individuals who gain weight and those who do not gain weight suggests that more than 50 percent of the weight gain is the consequence of activity levels. Unfortunately, our work and other similar studies indicate that approximately 100 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (equivalent to walking at about 3 mph) is required to prevent weight gain if conscious dietary modification is not also followed. Obviously in our affluent, labor-saving Western lifestyle, some combination of dietary restraint as well as increased physical activity is probably required for most of us.”

Because of the discipline required for weight management, Hunter says it is not surprising that 80 to 90 percent of people who lose weight regain it within four years.

Since physical activity seems to be so important for helping maintain weight, finding ways for individuals to be more active is of utmost importance. This does not just mean physical training, but being more active in our everyday life. “For example,” Hunter says, “taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking to the store rather than driving, pushing a lawnmower rather than riding, and raking leaves rather than using a leaf blower are all ways we can increase our activity levels with little or no loss of time. We feel that exercise training has a double advantage for weight control. Not only is energy being burned at a rapid rate (normally about twice the rate of 3

mph walking), but the increased fitness gained from the training will make it more enjoyable to climb the stairs and push the mower.

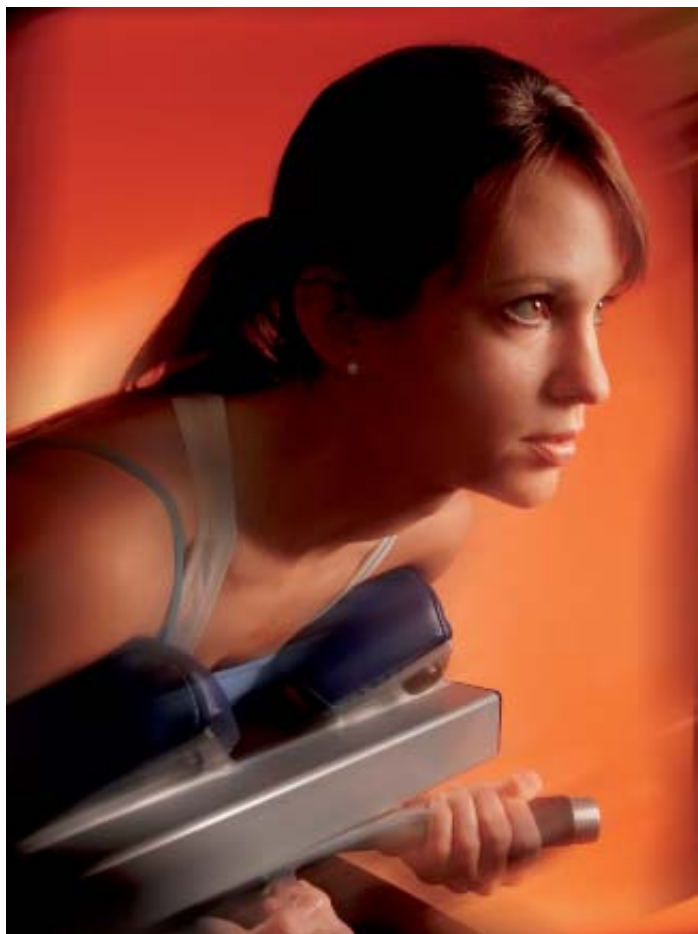
“If we can determine the most efficient exercise program for maintaining weight loss, we might be able to help people avoid the cycle of continually losing and regaining weight.”

Participants in the study are enrolled in a weight-reduction program with food provided and may be selected into either a weight-training or aerobic-exercise program. A one-year follow-up featuring continued exercise will examine the effects and whether or not participants con-

tinue to maintain weight loss.

“Aerobic training usually burns more calories than weight training,” Hunter says. “But weight training builds strength, which makes exercise easier and often more comfortable. Added strength makes being physically active more pleasant, which might prompt people to continue to exercise and remain physically fit after weight loss.”

Participants will receive information on their calorie expenditure, physical-fitness level, and body composition. All participants will be enrolled in UAB's EatRight Weight Management program during the year following weight loss.



Studies show that adding weight-resistance training to traditional aerobic exercises is more effective in helping participants keep weight off than aerobic exercise alone.

What's on the Menu?

Nutrition a Growing Concern for Parents, Educators

A recent *New Yorker* cartoon showed two witches talking to each other as they look out the window of a gingerbread house. A rotund Hansel and Gretel run by, and one of the witches says to the other: "Remember when we used to have to fatten them up first?"

It's not just witches who have noticed that America's children are gaining more weight than they should. Parents and doctors are also observing the trend and trying to figure out where to lay the blame.

One possible culprit is the increasing amount of fast food being offered in school lunchrooms across the country, coupled with high-calorie snacks and soda vending machines in school hallways. Fats and sugars that were once reserved for after-school treats are being gobbled up long before the final bell rings.

Some parent groups are calling for the removal of fast-food choices from the lunch menu and the banning of vending machines altogether.

Professor Retta Evans, Ph.D., an expert in the area of childhood obesity and physical activity who recently joined UAB's health education faculty, says that while she sympathizes with those parents, their proposed solution won't end childhood obesity.

"I wish it were as simple as children eating empty-calorie foods in schools," she says. "Unfortunately, there are various factors to consider."

While Evans believes that access to high-calorie food and sodas in schools contributes to the increasing obesity of American children, she says that declining physical activity, increases in both TV and video-game use, and poor parental role models are also to blame.

"Physical-education classes have dropped by one-third over the past 10 years, and children spend an average of 14 hours per week watching television," Evans says. "Plus, they have access to fast food literally 24 hours a day."

Dealing with the issue of improving school menus and vending machine use has become a difficult issue because it has become entangled with school finances, Evans says. "There has been an increasing trend over the past 15 years for schools to sign contracts with fast-food companies for 'à la carte' style food services instead of the national school-lunch programs," she says. "For many it's a cost factor. The schools are trying to make much-needed revenues. They get a percentage from the fast-food sales, and with budgets being cut they need the money."

The same financial forces often lead educators to put vending machines in school hallways because they share the revenues they produce—and it's not always a nickel-and-dime affair. "Some schools can make between \$20,000 and \$40,000 per year. That's an extra janitor or some other item that might have been cut from the budget."

So when they are faced with their children's natural inclination to eat fast food as well as the schools' need for revenue, what can parents do? "First, children do what their parents do, so we should role model good behavior," Evans says. "Parents need to open conversations with their children and tell them why they need to eat healthy foods. Then they need to find out what their school is doing. How much access do kids have to fast food and empty calories?"

Evans recommends that parents tread cautiously when dealing with school officials, because this is primarily a money issue to the schools rather than a nutrition issue. When both sides work together, she says acceptable solutions can be found. While there have been few comprehensive studies released on the subject, Evans says anecdotal evidence she has heard is encouraging.

"Many schools have been successful offering healthier choices in their vending machines—offering 100 percent fruit juices instead of colas, for instance."



Some schools are using financial disincentives to steer children toward healthier options in the vending machines. A student may pay only 35 cents for a whole-grain breakfast bar, but 75 cents for a candy bar. But Evans doesn't believe that simply limiting or removing fast food, snacks, and colas from schools will resolve the issue of overweight children. The best solution, she says, will be a shift in society's attitudes.

"Fast foods and junk foods have become the norm. We see them on TV, in magazines, and everywhere else. But I do believe that's beginning to change. We're seeing things like fresh fruits, bananas, and apples at convenience stores, for example."

The prevalence of fast food and high-calorie snacks in schools also makes for a tenuous situation for teachers trying to instill the basics of good nutrition in their students. Evans says those teachers must deal with their students openly and honestly.

"Teachers should engage their students in what choices that are available are sound choices and what should be reserved for occasional consumption—this can be a great teachable moment. Discourage junk foods and encourage nutrient dense foods in and outside of the classroom. This gives the message that, 'This is what I teach, and this is what you should fill up on.'"

School of Education Associate Professor Retta Evans says easy access to unhealthy food is only a small part of the nation's growing obesity problem.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES:

How NCLB Is Affecting Dropout Rates

You wouldn't think it takes rocket science to figure a school system's dropout rate. Simply subtract the number of students who finish a school year from the number who started that year. But when schools face loss of funding or even closure if their dropout rates are too high,



New legislation has created incentive for schools to be more creative with how they report dropout numbers.

simple math is sometimes replaced by complex formulas that attempt to make the bad numbers look smaller and the good numbers look bigger.

Zach Kelehear, Ed.D., an associate professor of educational leadership in UAB's School of Education, says the confusion over dropout rates is one of the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. While that legislation attempted to improve the lot of America's schoolchildren, it gave educators a strong motive to massage their numbers. "There's a real incentive to do the best one can," he says.

Following the implementation of No Child Left Behind, news organizations in Houston and New York uncovered cases of administrators intentionally miscoding some students to improve their schools' dropout rankings. Additionally, states like Alabama only guarantee public education until the age of 16. Students above that age can leave school easily,

be persuaded to leave school either actively or passively by administrators, or can be dropped from school rolls due to poor attendance or a perceived lack of interest.

"As long as we are restricting school success rates to a single assessment, we are running the risk of this happening," Kelehear says.

The problem is not new. Back in 1990 the Southern Regional Education Board reported that "it is not possible to compare dropout rates among the states because there is neither a common definition of the term 'dropout' nor a uniform method of collecting information at the state and national levels."

No Child Left Behind attempted to improve that situation by giving a specific definition to the term that's often seen as the mirror image of the dropout rate—the high-school graduation rate. However, the act gives states some wiggle room in calculating those numbers, leading to the same kind of confusion that has clouded the issue for decades. Several studies conducted last year by the nonpartisan Urban Institute documented the differences in the ways the numbers are gathered.

"The studies find that different methods produce different results and that, in some cases, these disparities in graduation rates can be quite large," the Urban Institute reports. "More specifically, evidence also suggests that approaches for calculating graduation rates based on data about dropouts produce inflated estimates compared with other methods."

FOUR WAYS OFFICIALS CAN HELP KEEP STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

1. Smaller schools – These allow administrators to be more trusting and caring.
2. Smaller classes – Teachers can know students better and be more accountable.
3. More challenging classes for all students – Pupils who are left out of enrichment programs are more likely to drop out.
4. Portfolio assessment – This gives the schools other ways besides traditional tests to evaluate student performance.

HELLOS AND FAREWELLS

The UAB School of Education faculty, staff, and students warmly welcome new faculty members

Melissa Williamson Hawkins, Rebekah Ranew

Trinh, Jamielyn Stallworth, Traci Tommie, Roslynn

Johnson, Edward Arockiaswamy, Nataliya

Ivankova, Michael Brooks, and Barry Stephens.

HELLOS

Melissa Williamson Hawkins, Rebekah Ranew Trinh, Jamielyn Stallworth, Traci Tommie, Roslynn Johnson, Edward Arockiaswamy, Nataliya Ivankova, Michael Brooks, and Barry Stephens.

FAREWELLS

Betty Trammell, Lynn McCall, John Armstrong, Tracee Synco, Dail Mullins, Charles McLafferty, Levi Ross, Alicia Gibbs, Margaret Williams, Virginia Redd, Gwen McCorquodale, Christina Sanders.

Kelehear says the problems with calculating graduation numbers and dropout rates begin as soon as educators start deciding on how these indicators are to be defined. "Are we talking ninth to twelfth grade, or tenth to twelfth grade? Are we talking 15- to 18-year-olds, or 15- to 24-year-olds? The ambiguity breeds frustration," he says.

Despite the controversy over how to measure the dropout rate, Kelehear says most education officials have a sense that the numbers have been stable for some time; the best estimates he has seen show that between 85 and 87 percent of high-school students either graduate or receive an equivalent diploma.

Regardless of how educators calculate dropout rates, one goal they share is to keep as many students as possible within the traditional school setting until they graduate. Kelehear says the formula for doing that has been known for decades: Make schools more student-friendly. "It's the most important thing schools can do," he says. "Places that are seen as trusting and caring have a much higher retention rate."

The educational tone of a school is almost always set by the principal, Kelehear says, and he has this advice for administrators who want to keep their students from running away: "If you want to be successful as a principal, you must know every student's name."

Tired of Earning **3.9%** on your CDs?

Here's a Tax-Wise Alternative

If you are age 60 or older and you're tired of watching your interest rates and stock values decline, you may find that a **School of Education Charitable Gift Annuity** can be a smart move for you. Here's one way you can modify your investment strategy and make a significant gift to the School of Education:

If you are age 70 and create a **\$50,000** gift annuity with cash, you will receive the following benefits:

Rate of return	6.5%
Guaranteed annual income for life <i>(For the first 16 years, nearly 60% of this income amount is tax-free.)</i>	\$3,250
Federal income tax charitable deduction	\$19,759*

You also may fund this gift annuity with long-term appreciated securities and receive similar benefits with a portion of the tax-free income being allocated to capital gain income.

Gift annuities may be used to endow and name many important programs, such as scholarships, research projects, and professorships.

Sample Rates of Return

Single Life

Age	Rate
60	5.7%
65	6.0%
70	6.5%
75	7.1%
80	8.0%
85	9.5%
90	11.3%

Two life gift annuities are also available at slightly lower payout rates.

UAB Torchlighters Society

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Through Planned Gifts

For additional information, please call (205) 934-0759 or complete and return the reply card. Advice from your tax or legal advisor should be sought when considering these types of gifts.

***Amount of charitable deduction may vary slightly (based on federal charitable mid-term rate of 5 percent).**

SCHOOL NOTES

Christina Ollinger Neely was recently named the Elementary Teacher of the Year and Alternate Teacher of the Year by the Alabama Department of Education.

Neely teaches first grade at Crestline Elementary School in the Mountain Brook City School System. She earned her master of arts in reading and early childhood education from the UAB School of Education.

Glenn K. Rice, a teacher at Cherokee Bend Elementary School in Mountain Brook, recently received the *Birmingham Post-Herald* Distinguished Teacher Award. The award was given in recognition of Rice's "outstanding teaching, leadership, and community involvement."

Rice received his certificate of advanced study in education from UAB in 1973.

Ramsay High School English teacher **Emily Norton** has received the Advanced Placement (AP) English Teacher Award. The prize was presented to her at the Haggerty High School Articulation Conference held earlier this spring at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The conference is sponsored by UAB Department of English

and the English Department Advisory Board.

The AP English Teacher award is designed to honor a teacher who models the personal dedication and professionalism of a successful AP English teacher.

The award includes a \$500 cash prize and a \$200 gift certificate from The Alabama Booksmith. This is the second year for the award.

Norton teaches three advanced placement English classes at Ramsay. She has been teaching for nearly 25 years.

Nominees for the Haggerty High School Articulation prize are judged on their course syllabus, sample assignments that demonstrate a creative approach to teaching, and students' writing samples. Winners are selected by members of the UAB Department of English faculty and the English Department Advisory Board.

The conference is named after **John J. Haggerty**, an associate professor emeritus and former chairman of the Department of English. Haggerty established the conference in 1975 to promote communication and interaction between UAB English faculty and English teachers in the Birmingham public schools.

Michael J. Froning, Ed.D., dean of the School of Education, recently joined nine other national education leaders for a roundtable titled, "Fulfilling the Promise of Brown vs. Board."

The event was held in May at the Senate Dirksen Office Building in Washington, D.C. The discussion focused on the progress made since the historic court decision and what steps remain to close the achievement gap with an examination of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The roundtable launched the national initiative, Eleanor & Brown, to commemorate both the 50th anniversary of the Brown decision and the human rights legacy of Eleanor Roosevelt. The initiative, created by the National Urban Alliance (NUA), the Eleanor Roosevelt Center, and the College Board, is designed to build support for furthering equity in education and eliminating the achievement gap. U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu hosted the roundtable with organizational help from the NUA.

The School of Education has recently joined as an official affiliate of the NUA.

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