

THE MIT CONNECTION

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March 2005

A MAN OF EXPERIENCE A CONVERSATION GERY GERST

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As I walked to my interview with MIT part-time faculty Gery Gerst with one of my fellow MIT classmates, I was told, "This guy was the best teacher I ever had." I became even more intrigued by this comment. Not only was he the elusive second year field expert, but the best teacher in a graduate student's entire educational career.

Gery Gerst was born in Houston, Texas and later in his youth moved to Seattle. His mother encouraged him to lose his southern accent in order to fit-in in the north. One of the most influential experiences in Gery's life was a motorcycle accident in high school. It took him about a year to fully recover, and it interrupted some of his plans. Significantly, it kept him from joining the US Military (Air Force), and this "supernatural intervention," as he called it, led him to teaching. Looking back Gery is grateful because, "I could have been dropping napalm in Vietnam, but instead I was teaching."

Gery attended St. Martin's College and majored in history, minoring in Spanish and Education. He graduated valedictorian and 30 years later returned to give the commencement speech in 2001. He then obtained his teaching certification in social sciences through the

University of Washington, but two-thirds of the way through his Masters in Education Gery quit the program and looked for alternatives. He felt the program, at the time, was stifling and did not allow for his



input or meet his needs. Ultimately, he transferred to Western Washington University to finish his Masters in Education with an emphasis on classroom applications of technology. He once again graduated as valedictorian and he has "no regrets."

Among an eclectic mix of jobs and positions, Gery taught "every facet of social studies" at Olympia High School for 29 years. He also coached wrestling, was a leader of the teacher's association at the state and local levels, and was a representative of teachers' rights at the national, state, and local levels. He was also the

Olympia Educator of the Year for 1999-2000. Although, he is now retired from Olympia High School, he still leads students from area schools on American Heritage tours of the East Coast.

Fortunately, he also spends his retirement with MIT. He is a resource faculty member that works with MIT second year students only. He is the field expert who helps students understand the realities of schools, such as implementing policy changes, working with other faculty, and the politics within the school. This experience is invaluable for second year students who are facing those realities as student teachers and will be facing them once they are hired for teaching positions.

Gery is familiar with a few different teacher education programs and he firmly believes that Evergreen's program prepares pre-service teachers for the classroom with commendable efficacy. He believes that many school administrators are beginning to realize this, and that Evergreen's MIT program's reputation has improved more and more with each year. Gery attributes this to the solid theoretical base in year one and the two student teaching experiences in year two. Further, he emphasizes the reflection process. He believes the model of theory to practice

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GRABBING LIFE WITH BOTH HANDS

FIRST YEAR STUDENTS SPEND A QUARTER WITH EVELIA ROMANO



endorsement credits for bilingual/ESL education. The Masters in Teaching faculty began to have regular contact with Evelia, and winter quarter 2005 was her first time working in the MIT program.

When I asked what she thought about the 2006 cohort, she responded that it was too early in the quarter for her to know anything just yet. However, she certainly believes that the cohort was well prepared in fall quarter to discuss winter quarter issues relevant to language acquisition and intersections of culture and language with education. She

Evelia Romano was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She attended the Catholic University and achieved the equivalent of a Masters in Literature in the United States. At the age of 23, she left Argentina and went to Japan on a scholarship through the Ministry of Education of Japan to study Kabuki, a traditional Japanese theater form. During her two and a half years in Japan, she met and married her husband, Erik Thuesen. She left Japan to attend the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she earned a PhD in Hispanic languages and literature. While there, the first two of Evelia's three children were born, Jeremias in 1988 and Iris in 1991.

In 1992, Evelia was hired by Evergreen, and she and her family moved to Olympia. She was attracted by Evergreen's alternative approach to education, and the interdisciplinary, multi-quarter format of its programs. Marina, her third child, was born here in 1994.

In 1994 Evelia created a bilingual education and teaching program for upper level undergraduates who have studied another language or were bilingual and considering a career in education. The class fulfilled the

also believes that as Masters students, there is a strong level of commitment to education. Ultimately, she's still in the process of determining how well students are absorbing and cognitively assimilating the wealth of information she hopes to convey in winter quarter.

Evelia was in Argentina in the fall visiting with family and spending a good deal of her time writing, completing two books. She was also working with the English Scholastic Association of the River Plate, the organization that coordinates and monitors bilingual schools in Argentina. She will be returning in March for family reasons. She will be missed by many of her fans in the 2006 cohort, and her time with the program has been invaluable.

When I asked Evelia about a life motto, she responded with a quote by Bertolt Brecht: "The people who work and struggle for one day are good, for a long time are very good. Those who do it for a lifetime are indispensable." Evelia says that this quote helps her when she feels like giving up because the battles we face are intense. She said, "life is hard, but it's the only thing we have, so better grab it with both hands." Evelia does indeed seem to grab life with both hands, and demands that her students do the same.

A BIG THANK YOU!

Thirty five student teachers are placed in the following schools this spring...

Green Gables Elementary in Federal Way School District; Franklin Pierce High in Franklin Pierce School District; Pioneer Middle in Pioneer School District; Chinook Middle, Mountain View Elementary, North Thurston High, Seven Oaks Elementary, South Sound High, and Timberline High in North Thurston School District; Capital High, Garfield Elementary, Lincoln Elementary, and Washington Middle in Olympia School District; Roosevelt High and The New School in Seattle School District; Gray Middle, Mt. Tahoma High, and School of the Arts in Tacoma School District; Black Hills High, Bush Middle, East Olympia Elementary and Tumwater Middle in Tumwater School District, and Yelm Middle School in Yelm School District.

Forty two MIT first year practicum students are currently placed one day a week for observations in the following schools...

Adna Middle/High in Adna School District; Centralia High in Centralia School District; Clover Park High, Lakes High, and Lochburn Middle in Clover Park School District; Federal Way High in Federal Way School District; Komachin Middle, Nisqually Middle, North Thurston High, River Ridge High, Seven Oaks Elementary, South Sound High, Timberline High, and Woodland Elementary in North Thurston School District; Olympia High and Garfield Elementary in Olympia School District; Henderson Bay High in Peninsula School District; Rogers High in Puyallup School District; Grand Mound Elementary in Rochester School District; Oakland Bay Junior High, Shelton High in Shelton School District; Jason Lee Middle and Stadium High in Tacoma School District; Tenino High in Tenino School District; Michael T. Simmons Elementary; Tumwater High, and Tumwater Middle in Tumwater School District; Evergreen Primary in University Place School District; Yelm High in Yelm School District.

We would like to thank the School Districts, Schools, and especially the Classroom Mentor Teachers who are providing MIT students with such a valuable learning experience.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

DARICE JOHNSON AND BRUNO BOWLES

Darice Johnson

Darice Johnson graduated from Evergreen's Masters in Teaching program in 1996. She went on to teach in University Place at Narrow's View Intermediate School, and spent six years at the African American Academy in Seattle. Currently she teaches language arts and social studies to 7th graders at Madrona K-8. She is also involved in the 6th grade intensive Rainier Scholars program for gifted students of color, and sits on the Advisory Board at the University of Washington. Darice has just been given a Golden Apple Award.

The Golden Apple Award is for teachers and programs across the state that epitomize excellence in education. Darice feels honored to have been recognized and rewarded for doing what she loves. She was nominated by a former student, which, for Darice, "made the award even more special." Darice's commitment to teaching and

her students is, indeed, worth recognizing. When I asked her why she became a teacher, she responded, "I didn't choose teaching, it's in my DNA, it's who I am."

Darice attended Evergreen as both an undergraduate and graduate student. She was attracted by the small size and Evergreen's philosophy of learning. She was involved in Umoja, the Women of Color Coalition, and the Services and Activities Board during her time at Evergreen. She took a class called "British Imperialism" while she was an undergrad, and it touched her. She said, "I never forgot that class and the important lessons we learned about apartheid and its ugliness."

So in July of 2001 she went to South Africa on a Fulbright grant she heard about while teaching at the African American Academy. She recalls, "It was the most incredible trip I've ever taken." She saw shantytowns, memorials, and landmarks, but her most memorable experience was having

tea with Walter Sisulu and his wife. She said, "Sitting and talking firsthand with a living legend was an absolute unique experience."

Darice believes her graduate education with Evergreen's MIT program prepared her well for the "real deal." She said "The program was realistic—it wasn't just theory, it was based on sound pedagogy." Further, Darice believes that the two student teaching experiences, with their focus on teaching in more than one type of environment, is really worthwhile. She enjoyed her professors, her classmates, and all the opportunities the program provided to get involved in the field.

Darice's commitment and passion for teaching is clear in her continuous involvement in education outside of her classroom and the joy she expresses in being able to do that which she loves. Congratulations to Darice from the MIT Connection. She certainly has earned her spotlight, and is a source of inspiration for future graduates. Darice has a saying in her classroom: "The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work."



Bruno Bowles

Bruno Bowles, a 2001 Evergreen MIT graduate, has been recognized by the Environmental Association of Washington as the 2003-2004 Environmental Educator of the Year for his work with the Tacoma EnviroChallenger program. Bruno believes this recognition, "shows me the importance of the work I choose and the need to help spark the imagination of our future land stewards." So what is that work, exactly?

Traveling in the EnviroChallenger van, Bruno, and his partner Sarah Amber, run in-class workshops on environ-

mental stewardship in Tacoma K-5 schools. They teach youth about the need "to reduce the amount of trash going into the landfill, reduce the amount of toxins making their way into the environment, increase recycling efforts, and to help protect water quality and endangered salmon." Further, Bruno works with after-school programs, pilot schools, teens, and adults on environmental issues in Tacoma.

On top of his role as coordinator at the EnviroChallenger program, Bruno is a member of the Washington State Recycling Association, Citizen's Advisory Committee for Salmon Funding, and the Board of Directors for The Environmental Education Association of Washington, a placement which came after they recognized him for his achievement last year. Needless to

say Bruno is busy, busy, busy. His environmental awareness stems far beyond his professional life and he is an inspiration to his peers and co-workers.

Bruno began coordinating EnviroChallenger in the spring prior to graduation from Evergreen's MIT program and has reached more than 50,000 students in the Tacoma Public Schools. His creativity, in part, is what landed him the job. When he interviewed for the position, in the usual shirt, tie, slacks, sportcoat, there was a program presentation portion. He left the interview and when he returned he was newly attired as "EnviroDude" complete with a superhero costume that included a cape. Although unusual, he was able to wow the panel with his energy, enthusiasm, and creativity.

The Evergreen MIT program served Bruno well in preparing him for "the job of a lifetime." He feels that the self motivated structure of MIT and it's emphasis on (continued page 6)

Words of Wisdom for Teachers

Hope Teague, a first year MIT student asked a 10th grade student at Adna High School for a list of things that she should consider in order to become a great teacher. Here are some very insightful and direct comments:

Look and act your age...not your shoe size

Set a point at which your students respect you but know that you still like to have fun. Being a pushover is not in your job description.

It's okay to identify with the students but don't sink to their level...you are a teacher, not a teenager.

Find common interests between you and your students, but do not go out of your way to please them and make them like you.

Be cheerful, but not "peppy". A good attitude will carry, but "peppiness" will annoy.

Be respectful of students and their social life, but take charge when talking becomes excessive.

Recognize when the atmosphere in your classroom is thick, tense or otherwise. Find something to help relax everyone. Pass out candy or take the class outside to lay in the grass. Sunshine is a natural stimulant.

Change up your scenery. Make things out of the box.

Make students think, debate and question their realities and societies. Students will remember a heated debate more than an hour of assignments. Laugh at them when you must.

A Wealth of Master's Projects

Do you know that the Evergreen library contains 436 different Master's projects created by MIT students from 1992-2004? Have you ever been curious what topics some of your fellow MIT peers have researched, and how to access this material?

Through the efforts of a graduate assistant this quarter, a list of Master's projects has been compiled and will soon be posted on the MIT website.

You can browse this list and when you identify a project you'd like to read further, then use the topic or author and log into the college's library catalog, where you can reserve the project and check it out.

Subjects range from: "Animal as Teacher: An Elementary Classroom Integration", "Digital Text and Young Writers", "Equalizing Access to Knowledge in Mathematics: Is Detracking the Answer?", "Famine: A Secondary Course Curriculum", "In Their Own Hands: American Indian Education By and for American Indians", "A Kinesthetic Approach: Learning Through the Language of Movement and Dance", "Mid-Level Non-Readers: Strategies for Helping Adolescents", "The Politics of Language and Code-Switching: Approaches to Respecting Student Dialects in the Class", "Quilting in the Classroom", "Science/Math Education and Educational Theatre", "Service Learning and Language Arts", "Teaching Methods that Match Learning Styles", "What are the Most Effective Teaching Strategies for Students with Oppositional Defiant Behavior?", "The Younger, the Better: Some Thoughts on Teaching Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools" and many more.

This year's current class of graduating MIT students gave 35 short talks and Powerpoint presentations on their Master's projects March 2nd and 4th for family members, interested Evergreen students, staff and faculty, and their peers. The diversity of topics was again impressive, including "Hip Hop and Adolescence: The Effects of Popular Culture Media on Adolescent Identity Development", "Eat, Drink, Think, Blink: the Effects of Diet on the Behavior and Cognition of Children", and "Handwriting: The Forgotten Art?" to name a

few.

While the process of learning to identify relevant research, critique its credibility, verify and accuracy, summarize findings and propose additional questions and applications to the classroom was a much bigger task than most students anticipated, MIT students agree completing a Master's project is a source of pride for them. The Master's project is valuable in not only the development of research skills, but in the acquisition of the habits of mind to inquire, plan, implement, reflect and assess as an educational professional.

Our hope is that our MIT students and alumni use research findings to inform and enhance their teaching, that they will develop an appetite to conduct their own research, and that they will enjoy conversation with colleagues about best practices.

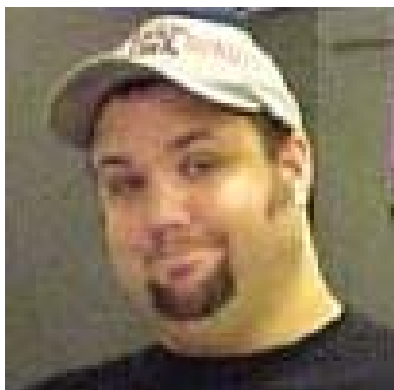
New Opportunities for Student Teacher Mentors

The State of Washington and Evergreen State College recognize that mentoring student teachers is hard work and is deserving of professional recognition.

Effective fall 2004, Classroom mentor teachers are eligible to earn a total of 20 continuing education clock hours (10 hours per instance) each year for welcoming and mentoring student teachers in their classroom.

For additional information contact Loren Petty at pettyl@evergreen.edu.

FAREWELL TO FORMER STUDENT, JOSHUA NILSSON



Joshua Nilsson, a 1998 MIT graduate, passed away from cancer on Monday, December 13, 2004 in Seattle. He was a teacher at the Taholah School and is mourned by his students, co-workers, wife, Angela, and his

daughter, Emily. He taught English, coached Quizbowl, and was the assistant football coach.

The principal, Jeffrey M. Clark, at the Taholah School and MIT faculty Jan Kido remember Josh fondly and insist that he will be missed.

Jan Kido remembers, “He stood like a giant sequoia, tall and with broad shoulders, and, he rarely, if ever, took up ‘space’ or ever monopolized ‘air time.’ He was respectful of his peers and faculty, yet could fearlessly challenge all.” Jan had only positive things to say about Joshua’s performance in the program. Further, she states, “I will miss him not being in this world.” Josh’s influence went beyond the MIT program into the

schools.

Jeffrey M. Clark believed Joshua “created an effective program” for his students. The principal’s regard went beyond the classroom and the subject of English. He states, “Josh was an extremely funny man, with a dry wit based on understatement.” The principal goes on the say that Joshua was beloved for that wit.

The services were held at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Aberdeen on December 17th. Jeffrey Clark commented that it was “one of the most beautiful and moving memorial celebrations I have ever attended. The small church was overflowing as students, teachers, and parents from Taholah were inspired to speak in memory of Josh. He is dearly missed.”

“SIS” LAVIGNE SHARES HER FALL STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

What endorsement area did you student teach in?
Middle Level Humanities

What was your teacher like?
My mentor teacher was very helpful to me, took time to go over my lesson plans, and gave feedback. She was very caring toward the students.

How open was she to transformational multicultural education? Or any of the other more progressive methods we have been learning about?
She totally agreed with multicultural education and was helpful in discussing the cultural background of the very diverse student population in our classroom, which was very helpful.

While she did not incorporate students working in groups or working with a more capable peer in pairs in her classroom, however she did let me do both. She provided a framework with the EARLS and I created lesson plans using the methods and theories I had learned. She let me rearrange the classroom as necessary to do group work. The arrangement was extremely successful and the students liked it.

How well did MIT prepare you for the

experience, if at all?
I felt that I was extremely well prepared, especially with a low income, high-risk population of students.

What did you learn from the experience about working in schools?
I found that the administration and school districts were working toward goals of progressive education. Yet many teachers



are wrestling with constant changes. I also found that having good classroom management skills in place is of the utmost importance so that you can spend time teaching, and not only be trying to maintain order.

Any transformational, powerful, or aha! moments during your placement?
I found that using the arts in my lesson plans provided powerful learning opportunities for all the students. I had 40% of my students with learning disabilities or were second language learners. The average reading level in the sixth grade class was at third grade or below. It was imperative that I used alternate methods of teaching so that all students could participate and be successful. My students were excited to come to class because they were engaged and able to participate. Their lack of reading skills did not hold them back from learning and their basic skills actually increased.

What do you think is the most important thing that you learned from this experience?
I found that I needed patience to take the time to teach the students new ideas in their learning, such as group skills and coming up with their own questions for projects. When I thought I was not being successful, I kept on and eventually the students were able to work successfully in groups and create their own inquiries. Practice, practice, practice, new schema does not happen overnight.

Bruno (Continued from Page Three)

how to work with diverse populations and non-native English speakers prepared him for his current position.

Further, the MIT program accommodated him to take the position three months before graduation. The professors were supportive and helped him work through the issues, much as if it were a student-teaching position, only without a cooperating teacher per se.

He gives this advice: "Being a teacher is not an easy thing. You have to be there...Be there for each kid, everyday, all year, for many years."

Bruno loves his work, and it comes through as he communicates about what he does and who he is. He states, "The most satisfying part of my job is seeing the excitement in the eyes of kids in Tacoma. They get very excited about taking care of the environment...I am in my fifth year teaching in the Tacoma elementary schools and have been fortunate to see a bunch of kids grow up to be powerful voices for the environment and a healthy planet."

One of his favorite quotes is from Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

Articles, article ideas, poems, pictures....submit to Nanette Navarro for inclusion in next newsletter.

Navnan02@evergreen.edu

Gery Gerst (Continued from Page One)

to reflection and back to practice really increases the likelihood of fully understanding and implementing educational theory.

The conversation ended with a quote from Frederick Douglass: "There is no guarantee with action, only with inaction." Later that afternoon, I ran into another first year student and told her that I had met with Gery Gerst. She had attended Olympia High School and commented, "he was my inspiration to become a teacher." Gery's lasting impressions let us know that Evergreen's MIT second year students are being taught by one of the best.

Time to update your Placement File!

www.evergreen.edu/mit

WHAT'S NEWS IN THE CURRICULUM ROOM...

As some of you may or may not be aware The Evergreen State College Library has a curriculum room. What is a curriculum room? Well at Evergreen's Library on the third floor is a room designated entirely to teachers. Within its walls are methodology books, children's oversized picture books, videos, games, a large conference table, a couch, and of course curriculum/lesson plan books and materials.

Currently MIT has a graduate student spending a couple of hours a week in the room, putting materials back, organizing the space, creating bulletin boards that are useful, making it more user friendly, and ordering new materials. Its been a slow start, but I think you'll find the space friendly and useful. Expect to see subject labels identifying what resources are where, new and updated materials, and display boards in the coming quarter.

If you are interested in helping order supplies or create useful billboards, or if you simply have some ideas for useful materials, art, or displays please contact Nanette Navarro with the MIT office at navnan02@evergreen.edu.

So keep your eyes open for the upcoming improvements, and if you haven't seen the curriculum room, swing on by and check it out.

ALUMNI, STAY CONNECTED.....

Help us stay connected by emailing Loren Petty with all of your current contact information. In keeping in touch, MIT can keep you posted on news, career opportunities, educational opportunities and much more!

Include in your email to pettyl@evergreen.edu

- Name
- Phone Number (work, home, and/or cell)
- Email
- Mailing Address
- Year of Graduation
- Current Employment