

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Teaching to learn, learning to teach

Student teachers get hands-on classroom experience to perfect their craft

By Lauren Romero
THE BATTALION

Students are in a field classroom, where they are able to help the teacher. Although students don't teach, they can experience firsthand what a classroom is really like.

Connie Wood, a seventh-grade English teacher at College Station Middle School, is a mentor teacher to A&M students. She said being a mentor keeps her fresh and aware of her teaching methods.

"It keeps you on the edge — always working towards your craft," Wood said. "Your approach with the students needs to be relevant and current. You wouldn't want someone watching you if you're doing the same old thing."

Wood's main goal is to give the students she mentors an opportunity to see firsthand what teaching is actually about, rather than simply learning teaching theory.

"Student teaching is where the river meets the road," Wood said.

Wood said a lot of students have the impression that teaching is like the fantasy world where teachers simply stand in front of the classroom, and automatically make a difference in their students' lives.

"Teaching is a ton of paperwork," she said. "Students get to see that too."

She said that by participating in the mentorship program, students are able to decide if teaching is for them. When they become a student teacher, they have already had a glimpse of what student teaching is like.

"The national average for a person to stay a teacher is three years," she said. "Student teaching is really important."

Skelton said student teaching will let her know if she is ready or not.

"I really am looking forward to it," she said. "The nice thing about it is, it's almost like having your own class."

Pepper said she is excited about being in an actual classroom, but she said she knows she will be extremely busy during her student teaching semester.

"It's like a full-time job, but instead of getting paid, I'll be paying A&M," she said.

Wood, who received "Teacher of the Year," has been teaching for

Kimberly Skelton has wanted to be a teacher all her life. Skelton, a senior interdisciplinary studies major, never had any decision to make about which level to teach. She said she has always wanted to teach elementary school, based on the experience she had as a child.

"I want the children's experience to be as great as mine," she said. In the fall of 2003, there were 3,314 undergraduate students in the College of Education and Human Development. Many of these students will later become teachers.

In addition to coursework at Texas A&M, students in the interdisciplinary program are required to student teach for 12 weeks before they graduate. Students receive six hours of credit during their student teaching and must pay for tuition at A&M. Many students choose to stay in Bryan or College Station, but students can also go to surrounding cities such as Houston to fulfill their student teaching requirement.

Skelton is planning to go home to Houston to student teach, since she plans on living there after graduation.

"I'm going where I have the greatest possibility of getting a job," she said.

She will be involved in an inner city program with low economic status children. As a perk for participating in the program, students are paid \$1,000.

For her, though, the money is not the reason why she chose to participate in an inner city program.

"These children will be most rewarding to teach," she said.

She said these are the children who need a teacher's guidance more than others. She said it will be good for them to come to a school and have a teacher who cares about them.

"If kids are not getting any education at home, then it means more to them and to you as a teacher," she said.

Melissa Pepper, a senior interdisciplinary studies major, is not sure where she will be doing her student teaching. She said she is excited about being in a classroom.

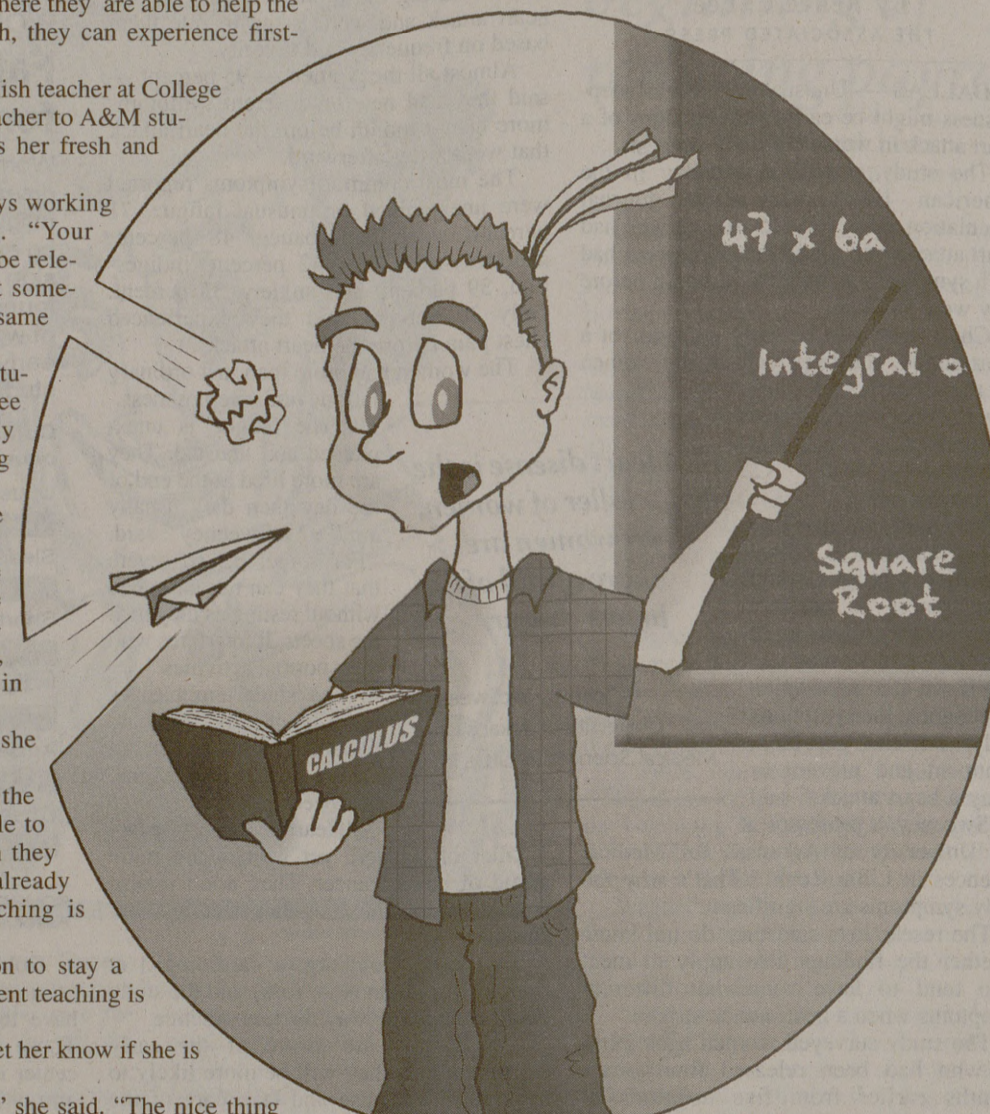
"I love working with children," she said.

Pepper wants to teach first grade, where the initial teaching of reading begins. She said she is interested in that, although she won't have a specific subject to teach.

"I will have to teach all of the subjects because I will only be certified for pre-k through fourth grade," she said.

She said her field experience classes, where she has a mentor teacher and observes at a school, have taught her more than she has learned in all her classes at A&M.

"It's all based in theory," she said. "Until I was in a classroom, I didn't understand how it works. There's a lot of support in these classes, which helps us," she said.



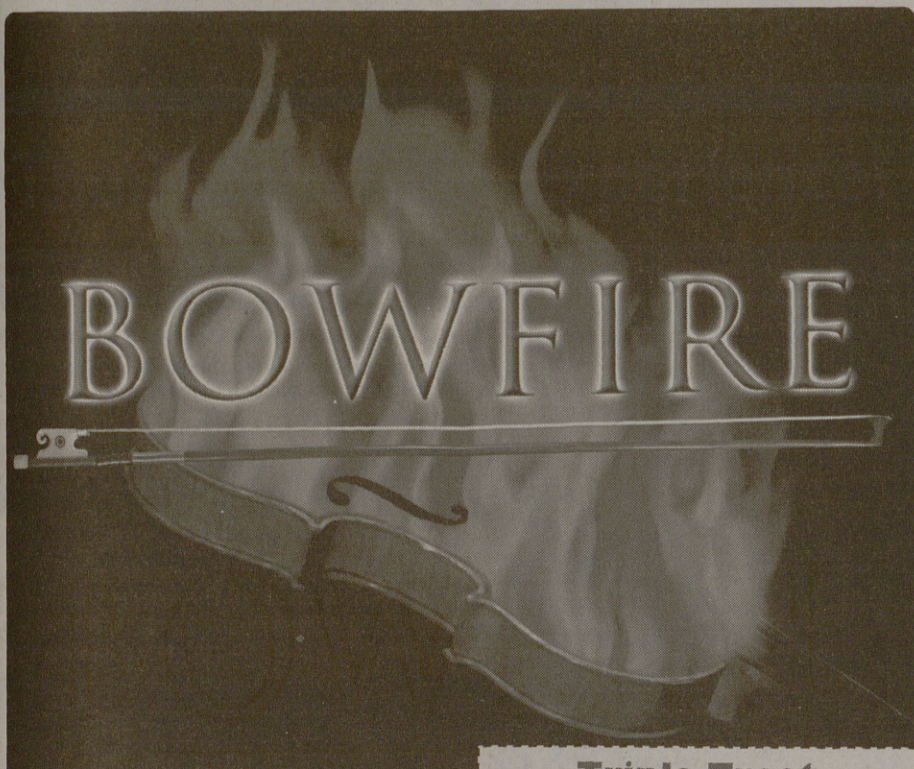
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10 years. In those years, she has taught more than 1,500 students.

To her, the relationships she builds with her students are more important than the curriculum.

"Teaching is about building relationships," she said, "and making a positive impact on the students' lives."

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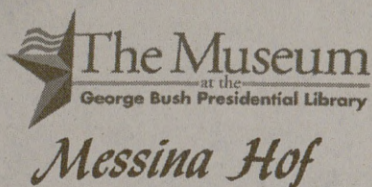


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