

DIFFERENT Like Us

Students in ANT 481 Anthropology is Elemental teach elementary schoolers to appreciate cultural diversity by introducing them to a scientific field often reserved for higher education.

BY ERIN MOSLEY

In a not-so-far-away land, vibrant creatures adapt with ease to their rapidly morphing environment. Undiscovered clans with unique customs and cultures communicate in a variety of languages. The clans work together, each respectful of the others despite their differences. This world does not exist in a remote jungle, nor is it the fictional construct of a novelist.

It is the collaborative creation of third graders in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Every week, University of Alabama students help children at two schools learn about anthropology – broadly defined as the study of human culture – by creating their own. Kids have fun, unaware their activities are part of an anthropological exercise designed by Dr. Christopher Lynn, associate professor of anthropology at UA, with the aim of fostering a generation of socially conscious and sensitive adults who are understanding and receptive of others.

“We are trying to open the world to them,” says Ashley Stewart, an anthropology PhD candidate and instructor of ANT 481 Anthropology is Elemental: Teaching Anthropology in Primary and Secondary Settings. “Just because a culture is different doesn’t make it weird or abnormal.”

In Fall 2016 and Spring 2017, University of Alabama students enrolled in ANT 481 Anthropology is Elemental taught weekly anthropology lessons to third graders at Tuscaloosa Magnet School – Elementary and Arcadia Elementary School. More than 200 children have learned about anthropology from approximately 20 UA students through ANT 481, now in its fifth year.

In classes with the kids, UA students cover the four sub-disciplines of anthropology – cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, linguistic anthropology and archaeology. Lessons include topics such as food, body



UA students including Kelly Likos help kids try foods from around the globe as part of their exploration of culture.

modification, ethnography, primates, evolution and race.

Lynn, a father of triplets enrolled at the Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools, initially wanted to find a way to introduce his children and their peers to the studies of anthropology and evolution, a topic often met with opposition in the deep South. “I never knew what anthropology was until college, so this was an opportunity that I could not pass up,” Lynn says.

According to a 2009 study titled Why Science Standards Are Important to a Strong Science Curriculum and How



UA student Laura Eddy helps children with an activity as part of a lesson about primates.

States Measure Up, the United States as a whole has been falling behind other nations in educational benchmarks, particularly science literacy, since the 1980s.

The study repeated a review of state science standards conducted in 2000. Each state was assessed on a letter-grade scale in both 2000 and 2009. Alabama received an F in both years, and researchers noted “only Alabama dropped in the score for biological evolution.”

Kelsey Kennedy, a senior from Harvest, Ala., majoring in anthropology, says teaching children about anthropology lifts the veil on a field of study that can seem ambiguous and unclear to those not involved in it. “We can expose the kids to something that is positive,” Kennedy says, “and it doesn’t have to conflict with religion.”

Lynn says lessons help children understand all people are connected, despite racial and cultural differences. Recent exploration of the genome has shown all humans share the same set of genes. “Evolution shows us that biologically, we are not racially divided,” Lynn says. Anthropology examines cultural diversity while proving all humans are fundamentally the same, he continues.

Through the ANT 481 course, anthropology majors learn to translate basic anthropological concepts to a general audience. Before students begin leading lessons at an elementary school, they spend four weeks in training. Each student must lead a minimum of two lessons in a school and serve as a co-teacher during other lessons.

A typical 45-minute session includes a lesson and an activity to solidify it. Kids might spend time developing their own tattoos and tribal markings from body paint during a study on body modification, or they might create their own imaginary species when learning about evolution.

UA students enter information about the lessons they create and lead, along with details about their experiences in the elementary classrooms, into a blog: anthropology.ua.edu/blogs/tmseanthro. The blog is public so parents and



Kids search for artifacts during an archeology lesson.

community partners can see what children are learning.

Tammy Barkey, head of the Parent Teacher Association at Tuscaloosa Magnet School – Elementary and a parent of two children who took the anthropology class, says the program is a wonderful way for children to gain exposure to an important field, and it could spark long-term interest. “It’s not uncommon for a child to do more research when the information really clicks,” Barkey says. Because TMSE is a project-based school, teachers encourage research outside the classroom setting.

Recently, Lynn received a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, a New York-based organization dedicated to advancing anthropology throughout the world. With the aid of this grant, Lynn and his students are further developing *Anthropology is Elemental* so it can expand across Alabama and into other states.

Kennedy uploads teaching materials to the program blog, where all lesson plans are free and accessible to instructors who want to teach similar classes. Hannah Tytus, a senior from Cincinnati majoring in anthropology, manages public relations for the program.

Tytus says by the time kids reach the end of the program, there’s a shift in their behavior, particularly in the way they treat each other. By studying other cultures, children learn to be empathetic and tolerant, she says. “They really internalize the message that they are supposed to be kind to one another,” she adds. “They are 8 years old and they’re telling each other to look through the eyes of someone else.”

Tytus says she’s learned children can be an agent for positive change in uncertain times. “Adults have a hard time doing that,” she says. “I now see that children are our most important resource.”

To learn more about Anthropology is Elemental, see anthropologyiselemental.ua.edu or contact Dr. Christopher Lynn at cdlynn@ua.edu or 205-348-4162 or Ashley Stewart at anstewart1@crimson.ua.edu.

Incorporating the ARTS

Students in a cooperation and conflict course bring creative classes to kids through Arts Renaissance in Tuscaloosa Schools.

BY MARY SHANNON WELLS

Although her day job is teaching classes as an associate professor in The University of Alabama's anthropology department and New College, Dr. Marysia Galbraith is also a potter.

"I value creative expression in my own life, and was saddened to learn how little opportunity there is for it in local public schools," Galbraith says. "Of course, teachers incorporate these activities into their lessons, but they have so many other obligations associated with curriculum. So the arts are often neglected."

Galbraith felt she had to do something to address the lack of arts education in her community's schools, and she used her role at UA to expand her reach and create deeper learning experiences for college students as well.

"My idea was to set up a program that offers arts workshops in all media – music, dance, theatre, writing, pottery, arts and crafts, painting, even engineering – to local public school children, particularly in Title I schools where a substantial proportion of the children are eligible for free or reduce-priced lunch," Galbraith says.

For the past six years, students enrolled in Galbraith's NEW 238 Honors Cooperation and Conflict course have led workshops in elementary schools through the organization she founded, Arts Renaissance in Tuscaloosa Schools (ARTS). Students hold hour-long workshops at University Place Elementary School in Tuscaloosa and

Matthews Elementary School in nearby Northport, Ala. Depending on teachers' preferences and the activity, a UA group can work with an entire grade in a large space like a lunchroom or with one class at a time. The NEW 238 students work in teams to plan and carry out the workshops, and each team of UA students conducts a workshop at least once a month.

Between 250 and 500 children attend ARTS workshops each semester. In Fall 2016, 17 UA students in the NEW 238 class led approximately 500 kids in art projects at their schools. Every semester, approximately 10 UA students also assist with workshops as volunteers.

"It's very fulfilling," says Ethan Johnson, a junior from Hartselle, Ala., majoring in computer science. "College is generally all about you and your future, so to get away from that even for just a day to work with others brings a great sense of joy."

After taking a few other service-learning courses, Brittany Grady says she fell in love with the ARTS initiative. She served as head intern for ARTS in Fall 2016, coordinating schedules with

students and teachers, guiding workshop ideas, recruiting volunteers and making sure students had supplies needed for their workshops.

"One lesson that I have learned as a result of working with ARTS is that large-scale change begins with community development," says Grady, a sophomore from Birmingham,



Molinda Hollie, a third grader at University Place Elementary School, shows off the pet rock she made during an ARTS workshop.



UA student Paige Orzechowski leads kids at Matthews Elementary School in a fossil workshop. *photo by Dysen Neeb*

Ala., majoring in interdisciplinary studies with a concentration in human rights through New College. “Putting time and energy into improving one community can be translated into impacting the entire world.”

In the NEW 238 Honors Cooperation and Conflict class, students explore the ways in which members of society succeed and fail in living together effectively. They investigate and seek solutions for contemporary social problems, most specifically the issue of social and economic inequality in the United States.

After every volunteer experience, they write journal entries reflecting on the community needs they observed and connecting those needs to course topics.

Dr. Tripp Marshall, principal of Matthews Elementary School, which does not have an art program or art teacher, says the activity he most enjoyed watching his students participate in involved creating pottery face jugs.

Marshall says he was especially touched as he watched one of his students working with the clay. “He may not have been a straight-A student, but he had an A project because he really cared, and he was engaged and he learned,” Marshall says.

During a paper-airplane ARTS workshop, children used the engineering-design process, a series of steps engineering teams employ to solve problems. This process is part of the kids’ science curriculum, so they learned how to combine art with another subject, something they had never done before, says Andra Craig, a fifth-grade teacher who has worked at Matthews Elementary for 23 years.

UA students say they look forward to workshops as much as the children do and find themselves learning

from the kids.

“These kids are so smart, and they never stop asking questions,” says Andrea Boyer, a senior from West Des Moines, Iowa, majoring in psychology.

Lucas Lowry, a senior from Shawnee, Kan., double-majoring in history and religious studies, says he didn’t expect to enjoy the workshops because he doesn’t consider himself good with kids. “But I found myself really latching onto the experience and curious about the things they had questions about,” he says.

Lowry also says leading ARTS workshops has taught him skills he’ll bring into the working world, especially with regard to communicating and training.

“One of the main things that I’ve had to do is rethink multiple times how to explain something,” Lowry says. “We talk a lot theoretically about how one size does not fit all when it comes to education, but I think ‘one size does not fit all’ also applies in any job you’re going to have.”

Boyer, who plans to become an occupational therapist specializing in pediatrics, says she is better prepared for her career as well.

“It is experience with patience and creativity, learning how to teach things at a level each age group will understand, and working on fine-motor skills, which OT focuses on,” Boyer says. “More broadly, it was a great opportunity for growth of leadership skills, time management and team cooperation.”

For more information about NEW 238 Honors Cooperation and Conflict or Arts Renaissance in Tuscaloosa Schools, contact Dr. Marysia Galbraith at 205-348-8412 or mgalbrai@ua.edu.

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