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Future elementary math teachers gain experience by helping Billings classrooms

BILLINGS, Feb. 19, 2014 – Before they even commit to their major, Rocky Mountain College students who become professional educators have worked plenty with their own future students in field experiences and internships, years before they student teach.

Mark Damico, assistant professor of elementary education, took his math methods class to Poly Drive Elementary School Tuesday, Feb. 11, to teach first graders at learning centers created by RMC students. A “learning center” is a place to enjoy work while developing understanding of a concept, or in fancy language, an interactive station with specific learning outcomes. His students were a mile and a world away from campus as they developed stewardship of the learning process.

Damico’s Elementary Math Methods class always includes field components as part of the learning process. “Our students learn best by putting theory into practice, by planning lessons or activities and then implementing their plans in the classrooms of our local schools,” he said.

Poly Drive Principal Kevin Croff said, “That’s great exposure for both our first graders and the RMC students. I encourage as much work together as possible between our students and those aspiring and inspiring teachers.”

After the experience, the students reflect on the experience by answering five questions:

• What were the most effective elements of your learning center?
• What were your desired learner outcomes?
• Did you meet the desired learner outcomes and objectives?
• What would you change/improve?
• What did you learn about teaching math to first graders?

Before each visit, Damico collaborates with the host teacher to determine what the class is studying. Then his class designs enrichment activities or learning centers to reinforce those concepts . . . as lectures are not usually the most effective education for either first-graders or college students.

“Principals arrange for interested teachers to contact me,” Damico said. His class will be working with kindergarten students in a few weeks and was with 4th grade students at
Alkali Creek Elementary School this week.

For Alkali Creek, Damico asked students of teacher Kayla Sanchez to compile a list of interests, such as football, dance, or outer space. He then matched his students with hers, so RMC students created a “fairly complex math problem” related to 4th grade interests, he said.

Alkali Creek Principal Greg Senitte said, “It’s very engaging for both Ms. Sanchez’s students and the RMC students. It’s a good practical eye-opener for future teachers. RMC students learn to scale back or to extend their lessons to account for individual differences.”

The measurable objective for both groups of students is how the lessons help grade schoolers recognize how to choose and use math in the real world in a problem-solving context.

RMC education students Brenna Robinson (l) and Bryce Baker help 1st graders with math skills at Poly Drive Elementary School in Billings, Mont.

(more)
RMC education student Brianna Parks helps 1st graders with math skills at Poly Drive Elementary School in Billings, Mont.

(more)
RMC education students Madilyn Young (front) and Anna Gregory help 4th graders with math skills at Alkalai Creek Elementary School in Billings, Mont.

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