**EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARDS**

The Office of Research on Teaching in the Disciplines

2018-2019

Authors: Patricia G. Elmore and Cynthia Sunal, Ph.D.

The University of Alabama

Year after year teachers try to find new and creative ways to present lessons to their students. The University of Alabama’s Office of Research in Teaching in the Disciplines (ORTD) recognizes the effort and high level of teaching teachers across the state of Alabama are displaying at every level, pre-Kindergarten through undergraduate. Teachers across the state of Alabama have submitted their lessons to be evaluated for excellence in teaching across the disciplines, as well as honorable mention and recognition. These teachers will be awarded with letters, certificates and/or plaques addressing their effort and excellence in teaching. For the 2014-2015 school year, teachers are being awarded in disciplines: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Gifted Education, Special Education, Physical Education, Undergraduate Education, Cross-Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary, Technology, and World Languages.

Teachers submitted lessons to the Office of Research on Teaching in the Disciplines, and the faculty members in subcommittees reviewed them, selecting winners, honorable mentions, and recognition. One rubric was provided to the faculty members in order to score the lessons accurately and fairly. The lesson reviewers represent knowledge in all disciplines over grades pre-Kindergarten through undergraduate education including gifted and special education. Chairs of the reviewing committees at The University of Alabama were as followed: Drs. Angela Benson, Kagendo Mutua, Craig Shwery, Karen Spector, Margaret Stran, Elizabeth Wilson, and Jeremy Zelkowski. Each chair worked with planning for the awards, notifying teachers of the program, reviewing submissions, and reviewing submissions with the rubric; this process is overseen by Dr. Cynthia Sunal.

**D**

edicated and responsible educators always endeavor to create engaging lessons that inspire their students and promote high-quality learning. The University of Alabama’s Office of Research on Teaching in the Disciplines (ORTD) seeks to recognize pre-Kindergarten through undergraduate teachers in the state of Alabama who demonstrate particularly advanced, meaningful, and innovative instruction. Teachers throughout the state are invited to submit their lessons to the Office of Research on Teaching in the Disciplines. The University of Alabama faculty members evaluate submissions in subcommittees and select which lessons, if any, will receive awards for Excellence in Teaching, Honorable Mention, or Recognition. Teachers selected for an award receive a letter, certificates, and/or plaques addressing their effort and excellence in teaching. A rubric is provided to the faculty members to guarantee a fair and accurate scoring process. Subcommittee members represent knowledge in all disciplines over grades pre-Kindergarten through undergraduate education; including gifted and special education.

For the 2018-2019 school year, teachers submitted lessons in the following disciplines: Cross-Disciplinary Teaching, Early Childhood Education, English as a Second Language, English-Language Arts, Mathematics, Physical Education, Science, Social Studies, Special Education, and World Languages. Chairs of the reviewing subcommittees at The University of Alabama were as followed: Drs. Tracey Hodges, Alison Hooper, Todd Hutner, Kagendo Mutua, Oleg Sinelnikov, Karen Spector, Elizabeth Wilson, Bedrettin Yazan, and Ms. Melissa Webb. Each chair contributed in planning for the awards, notifying teachers of the program, and evaluating and reviewing lesson submissions. Dr. Cynthia Sunal oversaw this process.

Ms. Lisa Rish is the 2019 Excellence in Cross-Disciplinary Teaching recipient. Ms. Rish is a third-grade teacher at Cahaba Elementary School in Trussville, Alabama. Ms. Rish writes, “I like to create an environment that allows my students to learn and develop a thirst for knowledge. I want to equip students with the talents and skills that they will need to make a positive impact on the world.” Ms. Rish’s lesson engaged students through movement, writing, discussion, lists, research, reading, analyzing, wondering, and questioning to learn about physics, lions, the environment, and humanity’s role in preserving the environment. During her lesson, traditional physics concepts were extended as students embodied these ideas through play-acting as lions. Her lesson successfully captivated students as they studied pushes and pulls, animal adaptations, interdependence, and the natural world. The lesson also served to help students realize concepts learned in school are applicable beyond the classroom’s walls.

Ms. Brooke Love is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Cross-Disciplinary Teaching. Ms. Love has taught for 13 years and is a math and science teacher at Chickasaw Elementary School in Chickasaw, Alabama. She is a mentor teacher, founder and sponsor of First Friends, and serves on multiple teams and committees. Her lesson focused on having third-grade students observe and describe worms. Students explored how organisms can be classified as livings things by observing and contributing to worm composting using a Can of Worms. Ms. Love’s lesson gave students hands-on experience as they observed living things using resources, growing, reproducing, and maintaining stable internal living conditions while living in a changing environment. Students also used a ruler to measure length to the nearest quarter inch; data which was organized and represented on a line plot.

Ms. Hillary Spratlin is the 2019 Excellence in Teaching Early Childhood Education recipient. Ms. Spratlin is a teacher at Madison County Elementary School in Huntsville, Alabama. Her lesson used the circus as a theme and was based on the interests of her pre-K students. Ms. Spratlin’s class engaged in both collaborative and independent project-based learning as students investigated self-selected topics related to the theme of circus such as “how is cotton candy made?” or “how do tightrope walkers walk on the rope without falling off?” Students created displays that showcased their research. As an extending activity, students signed up for roles and collaborated to perform a circus in which parents were invited to attend.

Ms. Lucy Williams is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Teaching Early Childhood Education. Ms. Williams has taught first-grade for 14 years and is a teacher at Chickasaw Elementary School in Chickasaw, Alabama. She writes, “This age group brings me such joy to teach because they are excited to learn and the growth they make within a year is amazing!” The purpose of her lesson was to have early childhood learners work together to create a solution to a problem with given materials. Specifically, students used the engineering process to design a nest for a penguin egg. Ms. Williams’s class used this lesson to both continue their study of penguins and to apply STEM concepts to the natural world. The lesson additionally served to teach students that failure is used in science to make improvements as students learned from flawed nests ways to improve upon their designs.

Ms. Lucia Guajardo is the 2019 recipient for Excellence in Teaching English as a Second Language. Ms. Guajardo has been teaching for two years and is a third-grade teacher at Chickasaw Elementary School in Chickasaw, Alabama. She is also an ESL tutor and an ESL representative for Chickasaw City Schools. The goal of her lesson was for students to become familiar with time by recognizing an analog clock, a digital clock, and numbers from one through twelve. Students used flashcards that provided the digital number as well as its word in English and Spanish. Students also created a clock using the flashcards and connected cubes to make sense of the five minutes between numbers. Additionally, students filled out a blank clock and created a clock using the parts of a clock (e.g., minute hand, numbers). This lesson provides an excellent example of giving students multiple entry points to understand a topic.

Ms. Christina Smart is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Teaching English as a Second Language. Ms. Smart has taught ESL for five years at O’Rourke Elementary School in Mobile, Alabama. In 2015, she also taught ESL abroad in Nepal. Her submitted lesson sought to introduce students to the grammatical concept of contractions and to gain mastery of how to utilize them in writing. Her lesson engaged students by using an interactive Nearpod lesson on contractions as well as a hands-on activity in which students play-acted a “contraction surgery” with words written on bones. During the lesson, students were given words such as “I” and “am” written on bones and band-aids. The band-aids were used to combine the words by blocking out dropped letters. Other creative elements such as surgical masks, gloves, and anchor charts designed to resemble doctor and patient charts were used to further engage students. The lesson concluded by having students use the Flipgrid application to create a short video explaining their understanding of contractions.

Ms. Aishia King is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Teaching English Language Arts. Ms. King is a teacher and department chair at Mary G. Montgomery High School in Semmes, Alabama. Ms. King was a panelist for Harvard University’s 2014 Black Policy Conference, was her school’s 2015 Teacher of the Year, and served as cabinet member on the 2017 State of Alabama Superintendent Teacher’s Cabinet. Her Honors English 12 lesson focused on helping students learn how to closely examine the author’s craft and to realize how authors use characterization in developing a story’s meaning. The lesson engaged students in creating a Character Fever Chart that tracks a character’s changing moods through *Macbeth’s* progression. Ms. King modified this activity by expanding it into a project that included analysis of quotes that displayed figurative elements, a writing analysis, a presentation, and a project evaluation. Students worked both independently and collaboratively. Students found value in creating a representation of what they learned as opposed to taking a test. Additionally, this project gave students the opportunity to gain in experience in creating attractive presentations.

Ms. Ashley Farmer is the 2019 Excellence in Teaching Mathematics recipient. Ms. Farmer teaches at Northridge Middle School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She is a seventh-grade teacher who is currently in her fifth year of teaching as well as a member of her school’s leadership team. Her lesson engaged students in exploring properties of quadratic functions. Using the Match My Parabola activity as a basis, Ms. Farmer customized equations for students to test on their graphic calculators while working in small groups. The lesson was exemplary in that is created a research-based task that allowed students to work collaboratively as they investigated the rules of quadratic functions. The lesson provided scaffolding techniques such as strategic questioning to meet the needs of Ms. Farmer’s students.

Ms. Amy Hilliker is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics. Ms. Hilliker is a teacher at Northridge Middle School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and is in her ninth year of teaching middle school. She has received past Excellence in Teaching awards, principal recognitions, and was named the Jacksonville State Teacher of the Year for the Tuscaloosa City Schools. Her lesson focused on having student describe the effect of dilations, translations, rotations, and reflections on two-dimensional figures using coordinates and to understand concepts related to line segments. As part of the lesson, a grid was created on the classroom floor using different colored tape. After researching and discussing real world examples of reflections, rotations, and translations, students were guided in performing transformations on the classroom floor which ultimately created an image (the word MATH). Students used CANVAS, an online interactive coordinate grid, to create their own images, which were later voted on at the end of the week towards small prizes. In reflection, Ms. Hiliker writes, “It always amazes me to see what students can create when given the freedom to, and we had some amazing work in the end.”

Ms. Robin Meadows is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Teaching Physical Education. She has taught K-5 for seven years at Chickasaw Elementary School in Chickasaw, Alabama. Ms. Meadows’s lesson provided students with the opportunity to run and job at a sustained pace for longer periods of time with goal of building stamina. The lesson took place inside to minimize environmental factors such as the weather or allergies and to increase participation in running due to closer proximity to the teacher. She writes, “this lesson prepares my students for an active and healthy life while improving self-discipline and reducing stress.” During the lesson, students worked on their running form. Students ran to music while observing rules and monitoring their own body’s form. Before and after running, students tracked their heart rate. While waiting for their turn to run, other students performed some type of movement such as donkey kicks to keep their heart rate elevated. Running students who needed to rest could enter a walking area for ten seconds. This lesson successfully engaged students in running while improving their form and monitoring their own heart rate and space in relation to others.

Ms. Kathy Eldridge and Mr. Nicholas Sourvelis are the 2019 Excellence in Teaching Science co-recipients. Ms. Eldridge is a teacher at Muscle Shoals High School in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Ms. Eldridge has taught science for 27 years. She is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher and a previous Secondary Teacher of the Year for Muscle Shoals City Schools and Shelby County Schools. In 2015, she journeyed to Antarctica as a National Geographic Grosvenor Teacher Fellow. Her lesson’s goal was to engage students in reading and drawing conclusions from a current scientific article that details the work scientists are completing with corals. By creating a story map with Google My Maps, students researched marine protected areas around the world and gained an understanding of the human impacts in those areas and what is being done to support ocean health. Ms. Eldridge writes, “By having students engage in research, conversations, and the creation of a story map, they are making emotional connections with the curricular content that will make this learning memorable.” This lesson encouraged student interest in the ocean’s health, biodiversity, and other environmental issues.

Mr. Sourvelis is a teacher at Cordova High School in Cordova, Alabama. He has been a teacher for eight years. His lesson, which was written for an AP Physic I class, had students identify external forces in a system and apply Newton’s laws graphically by using models such as free-body diagrams to explain how the motion of an object is affected, ranging from simple to complex, and including circular motion. Students used mathematical computations to derive simple of equations of motion for various systems using Newton’s second law and mathematical computations to explain the nature of forces (e.g., tension, friction, normal) related to Newton’s second and third laws.

Ms. Chandra Mason and Megan Nichols are the 2019 Honorable Mention co-recipients for Excellence in Teaching Science. Ms. Mason is a sixth-grade teacher at Northridge Middle School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She believes that “students learn best through hands-on learning, technology, and their own experiences.” Over the course of her lesson, students created realistic fictional data to generate an awareness public service announcement about the weather conditions in a specific location in the United States. This PSA included elements such as the location, the type of severe weather event, the levels of warning and watches, safety tips, and other related information. The PSA was created by recording and editing a video through Flipgrid.com.

Ms. Nichols has been a teacher at Chickasaw Elementary School in Chickasaw, Alabama for five years. She is a published author and illustrator of two children’s books and currently teaches creative writing, technology, character education, and health. Her lesson taught fifth-grade students how to create an algorithm to solve a problem while detecting and debugging logical errors within the algorithm (e.g., programing the movement of a character, robot, or person through a maze) using the Ozobot program. In groups, students created a narrative story that teaches a life lesson (e.g., slow and steady wins the race) or provides a possible problem solution (e.g., a malfunction at a shipping dock). Through collaboration, students designed a destination or route in alignment with their story and constructed a working model on Foam Board that conveyed the story written and the destination or route traveled. Students then filmed their Ozobot effectively traveling from point A to point B on a tablet or device and recorded their Ozobot story on an app. These projects were then reviewed by other students to provide feedback.

Ms. KayLaura Miller is the 2019 Excellence in Teaching Social Studies recipient. Ms. Miller teaches sixth-grade at Evans Elementary School in Albertville, Alabama. She is a graduate student at The University of Alabama and was named the 2018 Teacher of the Year at Evans Elementary School. She describes herself as “a tenacious teacher who provides all students with rigorous activities, lifelong skills, and engaging opportunities for success.” Students in her class engaged in developing a portfolio entitled “Presidents and Policies” while studying the ups and downs of presidential administrations. During the lesson, students practiced data gathering and analysis skills as well as communication skills through activities such as creating political cartoons.

Ms. Missy Pedigo is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Teaching Social Studies. Ms. Pedigo is a teacher at Northridge Middle School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and has 25 years of teaching experience. She writes, “my mission is to grow global learners through a welcoming and trusting classroom environment. I strive to create confident students ready to meet challenges ahead.” In her lesson, students identified causes and consequences of World War I and the reason for the United States’ entry into the war. Additionally, students explore technological advances of the war and their impact on modern warfare. Activities included creating enlistment propaganda, writing letters from the standpoint of a WWI soldier, analyzing primary sources, and exploring the realities of trench warfare.

Ms. Lisa Elrod is the 2019 Excellence in Teaching Special Education recipient. Ms. Elrod is a teacher at Northridge Middle School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Her lesson focused on teaching middle school students the functional skill of making pizza utilizing math, science, reading, language arts, and life skills. This engaging lesson gave students the opportunity to follow multiple steps, to apply different skills from across the curriculum to complete the real-world tasks of preparation and baking, and to create a (delicious) product.

Ms. Duanna Couey is the 2019 Honorable Mention recipient for Excellence in Teaching Special Education. Ms. Couey is a teacher at Nathaniel H. Stephens Elementary School in Alexander City, Alabama. In her lesson, third grade students were introduced to two-digit addition with regrouping. Students used manipulative items (e.g., thinking bubble, 10’s box, place value lines) for practice and were given a five-problem assessment. Visual and hands-on aides enabled students to make connections to abstract concepts that may have been otherwise difficult to grasp.

Ms. Katherine Ables Brewer is the 2019 Excellence in Teaching World Languages recipient. Ms. Brewer is a teacher at Albertville High School in Albertville, Alabama. Ms. Brewer has served 39 years as an educator at the secondary and post-secondary levels and in the ACCESS digital environment. Her lesson’s goal was for her high school students to develop interpersonal communication skills in Spanish, to apply vocabulary in cultural and situational contexts, to connect skills for mastery outcomes, to analyze written, oral, and aural learning, and to apply concepts for self to world settings. Students learned the numbers one through ten and the days of the week in the target language by applying them in real-world contexts such as reading and reciting their telephone numbers and reciting a days of the week song. Ms. Brewer writes that the lesson encourages “student motivation, engagement, ownership, active and interactive learning, and achievement’ by providing “relevant learning experiences that offered some students rare creative opportunities for self-expression and music.

**The following submissions received an award of recognition from The Office of Research in Teaching of the Disciplines:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Erin Coggins  *Sparkman High School*  Magan Grigsby  *Parkside Elementary School*  Monica Livingston  *Chickasaw Elementary School* | Amy Lowe  *Chickasaw Elementary School*  Robin Renfoe  *Northridge Middle School*  Jessica Stewart  *Albertville High School* | Cristy Thompson  *Fayette Middle School*  Jamie Webb  *Northridge Middle School*  Candance Young  *Paul W. Bryant High School* |