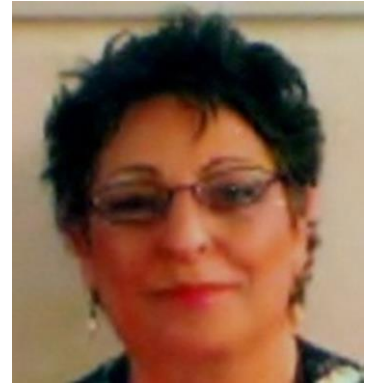


Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Ellen Silver-Horrell

University Lecturer
College of Education

Interviewed by Jessica Butler



JB: Tell us something about yourself?

ES-H: I am fortunate in having had the opportunity to attend and graduate from the College of Human Learning and Development (HLD) at Governors State University when it was competency-based and quite experimental. In fact, I moved here from Chicago's Northside to attend GSU, way before there was Prairie Place! As Dr. JoAhn Brown's work-study student, I learned how to create and then analyze the HLD needs assessment, which later was used by HLD's Curriculum and Instruction Committee to make the case for and to approve two half-time faculty positions, one in early childhood and one in bilingual education. Over the years, both of those positions have grown into concentrations and/or programs of study currently available at GSU.

As a student leader representing my "constituency", I not only served on University Committees, but also held the same voting privileges as Governor State University professors did. My professors and I knew each other by first names and seemed much more like mentors than professors may seem today. My educational training received at GSU prepared me well for working high needs populations in the Southland. I received my BA in Urban Teacher Education with certification in Early Childhood Special Education. After completion of dual certification, I was hired to teach first grade in Park Forest School District 163 and taught there for almost 16 years.

JB: What were the driving factors in your decision to join the GSU faculty? Please provide and anecdotal evidence you feel contributed to this desire?

ES-H: I have very strong ties to GSU and the College of Education Teacher Preparation programs. While completing my doctorate in Instructional Leadership, I was able to fulfill my internship requirements by working under Dr. Larry Cross, who was Coordinator of the Masters in Education program in the College of Education. This involved working with COE faculty on the Diversity Initiative for NCATE (Now InTASC) accreditation of GSU's teacher-preparation programs. The topic for my dissertation, culturally responsive teaching practices of pre-service teachers and their professors, grew out of that experience working on the NCATE Diversity Standard 4.

JB: What's your teaching philosophy or your outlook on higher education?

ES-H: My teaching philosophy is described best as eclectic, progressive, and constructivist. My beliefs and extensive practice are influenced deeply by the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey. Therefore, I believe learners of ALL ages learn best as active participants in their own learning. I also believe that learning occurs within a social context using language and cultural tools, so communicating, discussing, debating, dialoguing, and writing are central to the process of knowledge construction, along with direct experience. One of the reasons my education at GSU was so very effective is that I experienced these precepts in many of my courses and learning experiences as a pre-service teacher.

For instance, in the Cooperative Education Program, I was able to accrue academic credit towards my degree for actual real-life experiences working with young children, while also working 25 hours a week in HLD. I was able to apply theory that I was learning in classes to the real-world setting while working with youngsters. That is to say, by the time I left GSU, I truly WAS competent and “oh so ready” for a classroom of my very own!

JB: How do you see your role on campus, outside of teaching?

ES-H: I see myself as a role model for teacher education candidates and other teacher-practitioners. I try hard to model research-based best teaching practices in the various education courses I teach, so that students experience the practices themselves as learners first. For example, I model the use of collaborative small group work throughout the 15-week sessions. Also, I explain about how making good choices is learned behavior, but one that will not be taught unless students are given choices about their learning. Generally, in the beginning of the semester, some students are a bit mystified when I ask them their preferences and give them choices.

JB: What are some of your favorite things to do when you’re not teaching?

ES-H: I love to read for pleasure, to walk, and to ride my bike around Homewood. I also enjoy travel and meeting new people from geographic and cultural backgrounds that differ from mine. I would LOVE to pursue my own line of educational action research, when/if I can just find the time.

JB: Please list any awards or significant accomplishments that you are proud of?

ES-H: Foremost is meeting every goal that I had set for myself while attending GSU my first semester in the Warehouse, the year before the university moved to its current campus. I have practiced successfully as a child development specialist, a lead teacher in the GSU Multi-age Charter School, an innovative teacher and leader in two very progressive school districts, presented professional development opportunities to colleagues and teachers across the state, and now have the honor of teaching as a degreed doctor of Instructional Leadership in Higher Education.

JB: What do you love most about your job, Governors State University and your department?

ES-H: I love teaching teachers and teachers-in-training! I truly enjoy being able to demonstrate how to change theory into actual practice. Teachers with vision are futurists; no one can claim to affect our nation’s future more than we can... and we can have a life-long lasting effect on the lives of so many others. I think Christa McAuliffe said it best when she stated, “I touch the future; I teach”.

JB: What are your goals for Governors State University and your department? How do you plan to achieve those goals?

ES-H: Well, if I can get some spare time to write, I need to present and publish the results of my doctoral dissertation. Then, I want to move on to a tenure-track position. I am also extremely interested in technological advances and may take some GSU courses for the Technology Certification Program.

JB: Do you have any advice for current students?

ES-H: Learn how to “play the game of school”. It is the secret to being successful, both in and out of school. Be persistent and never, ever give up!

Have you developed any long lasting relationships with former students? What are some of the ways you stay in touch with them now?

ES-H: Yes, I have had the pleasure of developing long-term relationships with many of my former students. We try to get together for a meal and “talk” briefly on Facebook, text, and email. I have one student who recently graduated who called me before her first job interview for advice. I just reminded her of her qualities and that she COULD do it. If they did not select her, then it was not meant to be, and, their loss.

JB: If you had to sit next to someone one on a plane for the next 8 hours, who would it be and why?

ES-H: Hands-down, it would be Eleanor Roosevelt. Eleanor Roosevelt was an extremely intelligent progressivist with vision during a time of limited rights for women and minorities within the political arena. Overcoming personal obstacles, Eleanor Roosevelt found her path and went on to influence many ideas to promote equity across race and social class found today in America. I would love to go over the many social-benefit ideas she had that advocated for those less privileged in our country during an exceptionally difficult time for our country.