

## Learning is Never Done

The University of Central Arkansas College of Education Dean Victoria Groves-Scott works tirelessly to make sure future teachers enter classrooms adequately prepared, empathic and open-minded.

Groves-Scott, who grew up in Rogers, Arkansas, went to Drury University to earn her Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and special education. She began her teaching career in Kansas City, Missouri.

“I had children from all kinds of different backgrounds and I absolutely loved them,” Groves-Scott said. “But I felt inadequate in truly understanding them and meeting their needs. This was during a time when we were training teachers to ‘not see color.’ So we never talked about diversity or equity in my undergraduate education classes or in professional development. I recognized early on that approach didn’t meet the needs of my students.”

Part of her job in the North Kansas City School District was to identify students who needed special education services. Groves-Scott recalled an occasion in which they were accessing a Black student who had been referred as one who may need special education services. Working with the school psychologist and the student’s teacher, the team discussed whether to identify him as needing special education or providing extra help in the regular classroom. The student’s teacher said that her schedule would not allow tutoring.

“He was right on the line, so we started to discuss: Do we identify him as one who needs special education or give him extra help in the regular classroom? The school psychologist was pushing to identify because the student could potentially benefit from the extra support,” she said.

Groves-Scott remembers asking if they could arrange tutoring, but the teacher said that was not possible as her schedule wouldn’t allow it. In the end, the team voted to recommend the child for special education.

“Not a month went by and we had another student, who was white and male,” Groves-Scott said. “His test scores were nearly identical to the Black student, and the referral came from the same teacher, but this time the conversation was, ‘What can we do in the regular education class? We don’t want to label this child because it might hurt his potential to succeed.’”

The teacher agreed to tutor him.

“I remember looking at the teacher and saying, ‘I asked you if you would be willing to tutor the other child, and you said that it would be too much of a burden. But you can tutor this child?’”

Groves-Scott became interested in learning more about the effects of labeling and found children of color were more likely to be identified as having a learning disability. As she advanced in her career, Groves-Scott began to focus her educational philosophy on social justice.

“I tell the students ‘If you don't feel like you can be an advocate for every child that steps over the threshold of your classroom – whether they're Black, Latinx have two moms, transgendered or nonbinary – you are not going to be a good fit for our teacher preparation program.’”

Groves-Scott earned her Master of Arts in special education from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She then earned her Doctor of Education in special education from the University of Kansas.

Prior to coming to UCA in 2015, Groves-Scott served as assistant dean of the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. When she came to UCA, she stood firmly on a platform consisting of three ideas: authentic field experience, technology, and diversity and equity.

“I wanted to make sure we were preparing our teachers to teach anywhere in the state of Arkansas,” Grove-Scott said. “We have done a considerable amount of work in each of those areas.”

A few years ago, the College of Education received a \$75,000 grant that enabled them to partner with the disruptive educational equity project. They brought in a consultancy group to do a six-day professional development equity training.

“Every faculty member in the College of Education has gone through this training,” Groves-Scott said. “The training is about being in someone else's shoes and listening to their experience, without judgment. That has made a huge difference in our ability to look at structures.”

The grant also provided funds for a “Train the Trainer” program. As a result, UCA has nine disruptive educational equity trainers, and Candice Maxwell serves as a distinguished Educational Equity fellow for the College of Education

“She sits on my leadership team and works with a committee of faculty who look at our curriculum and do equity audits to see what changes are necessary. What should we add, what should we omit?”

Groves-Scott says the college looks closely at its policies and practices for admitting students. They're examining data to see if they are proportionally disadvantaging marginalized groups.

“I'm extremely proud of the College of Education and UCA for their commitment to to making a difference and to make sure we are open and accessible and supporting our students,” Groves-Scott said. “We've got a long way to go, but we have people who recognize that we have a long way to go. They are willing to do difficult things to move us forward.”