



GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY

PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE
FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHING



PCKET MANUAL

A step-by-step guide to navigating the PCKET major at GVSU

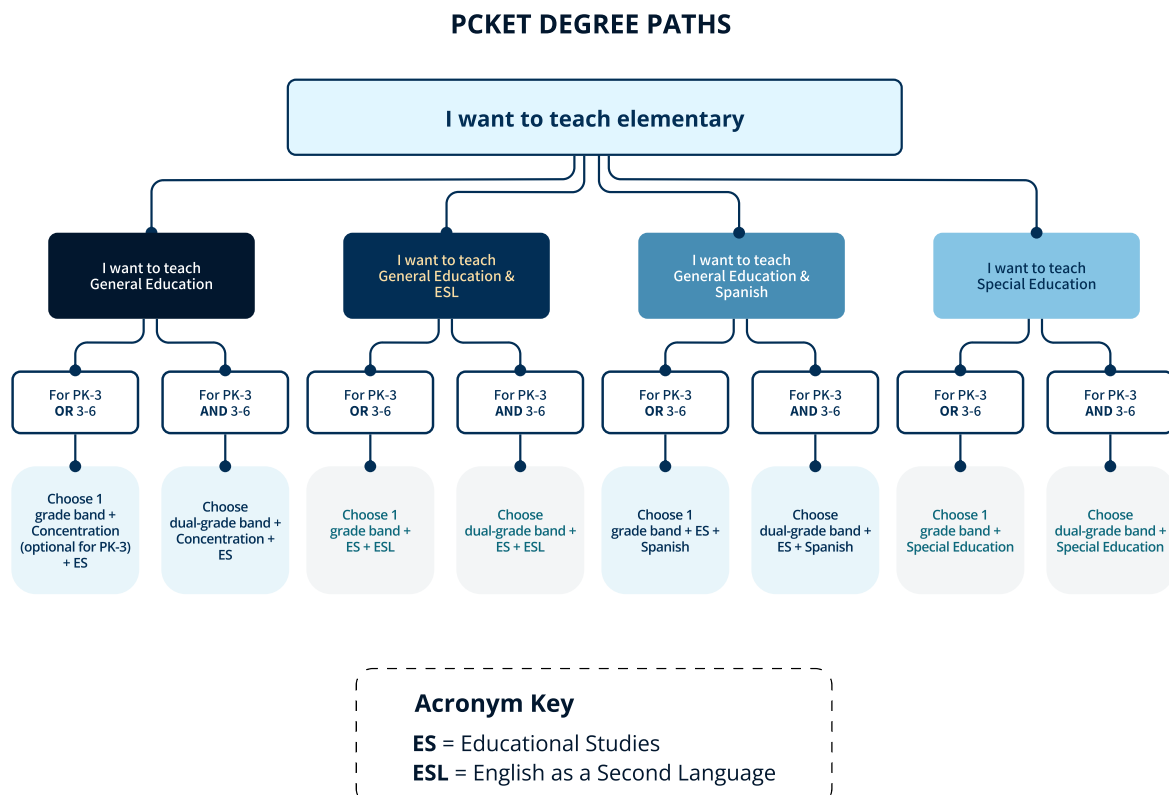
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the PCKET major! Grand Valley's elementary teacher education program is a double major: PCKET and **Educational Studies** or **Special Education**. The PCKET major is housed in the **College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS)**, while the Educational Studies and Special Education majors are housed in the **College of Education and Community Innovation (CECI)**.

What makes GVSU's elementary teacher education program unique? You have choices! You have a lot of autonomy in how you design your major. Depending on the grades you want to be certified to teach, you can choose an emphasis in pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade (**PK-3**), 3rd grade through 6th grade (**3-6**), or (as we recommend) pre-kindergarten through 6th grade (**PK-6**). You can also take courses to earn an **endorsement** to teach **English as a Second Language (ESL)**, **Spanish**, or **Special Education**. There are multiple ways to build your program, and your future teaching career!

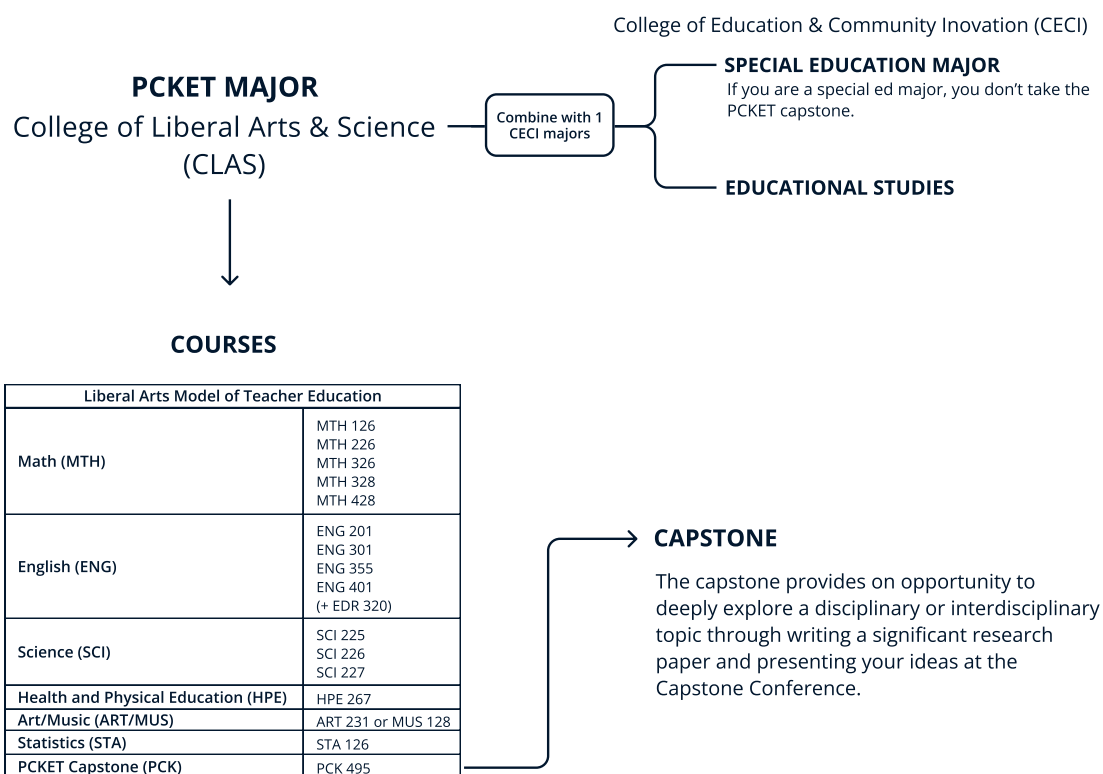


What is the PCKET Major?

PCKET stands for “**Pedagogical Content Knowledge for Elementary Teaching.**”

The PCKET major is an interdisciplinary major among the subject areas of English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Art, Music, and Health/Physical Education. In the PCKET major you gain both content knowledge (knowledge that will improve your own understanding of those seven subject areas), and pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge that is unique to teaching those subjects to children).

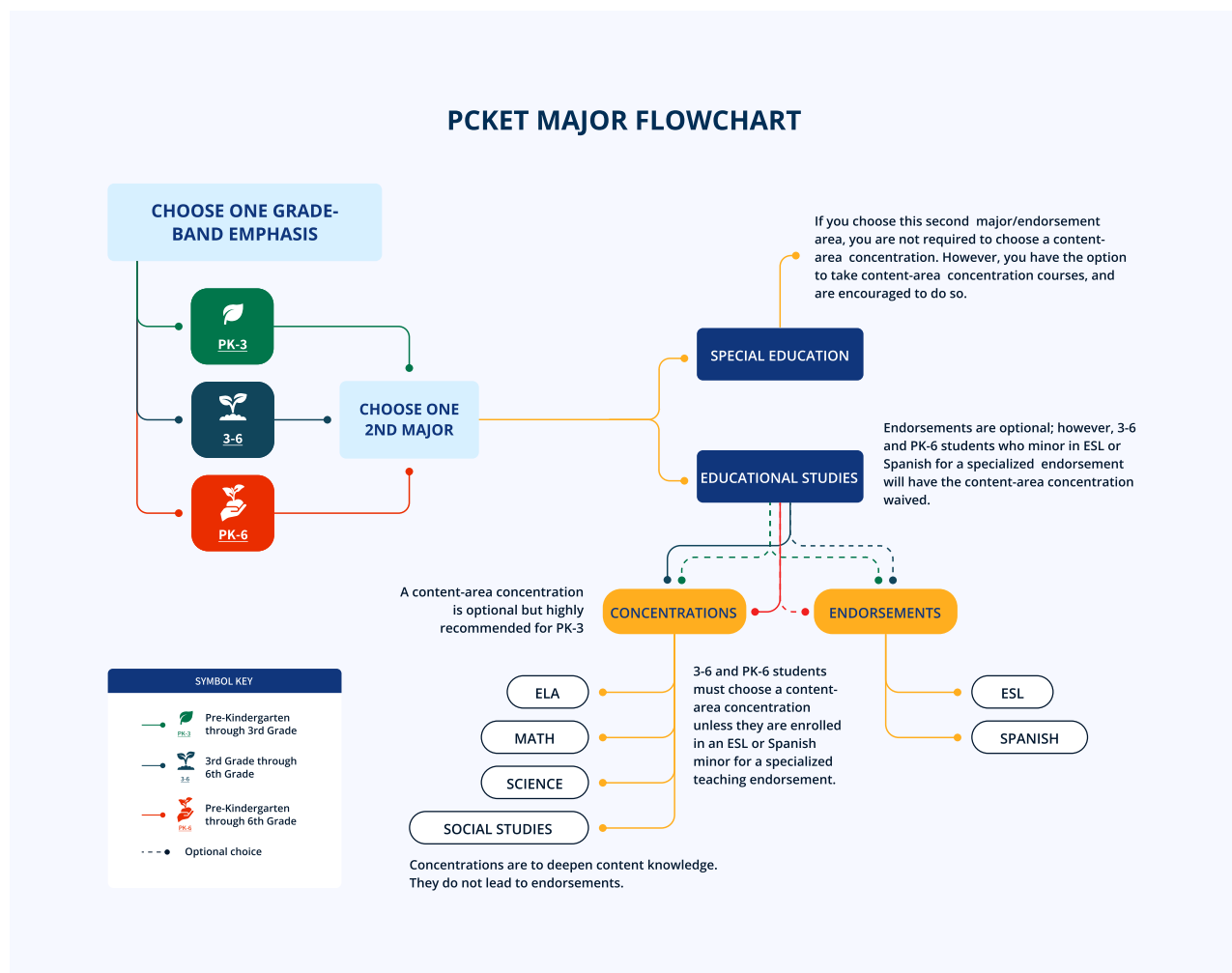
Stanford University Professor Lee Shulman coined the term “**pedagogical content knowledge**” (**PCK**) in 1986, explaining that it is a specialized type of knowledge unique to teachers, based on how they synthesize their pedagogical knowledge with their subject matter knowledge.¹ In other words, teachers have specialized knowledge in both content and how to best teach that content to children. This is the focus of the PCKET major.



¹ Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching. Educational Researcher, 15(2), 4-14.

What is a Grade-Band Emphasis?

As a PCKET major, you will choose a grade-band emphasis in **PK-3** or **3-6**, or a **dual grade-band emphasis in PK-6**. These emphases are based on the grade-band teaching certifications you can earn in the state of Michigan. We recommend that all students choose the dual grade-band emphasis so that you can be hired to teach both early elementary and upper elementary when you graduate from GVSU. We have designed the coursework so that it is possible for students who want to teach General Education to graduate with their two majors and both grade bands in four years. Even students who want to add specialized endorsements can graduate in five years.



What is a Concentration?

If you choose the **PK-6 dual-grade band** or the **3-6 grade band** and prepare to teach only **General Education**, you will need a concentration in **English, Math, Science, or Social Studies**. If you choose **ESL, Spanish, or Special Education**, then you do not need a concentration. Furthermore, if you are in the **Honors Program**, there is a built-in concentration, so you do not need a separate concentration. A concentration comprises a small number of courses to improve your content knowledge of a particular subject area. By deepening your content knowledge, you will not only be a better teacher of that subject, but you will also potentially set yourself up to be a content leader in your school.

What Are the Benefits of Getting an ESL Endorsement?

Public schools in the US are always changing—this is nothing new. As teachers, it is important to research the school where you will be teaching to learn about the demographics of your classroom. One demographic that is growing in the United States and in Michigan are English learners (EL). These students are learning **English as a new or second language (ESL)**.

Many school districts encourage their teachers to get **ESL certified** to be better prepared and more informed classroom teachers. If you decide to go back to get your ESL endorsement after graduation, many programs are at the graduate level. This means you will need an M.Ed. or M.A. in ESL. However, you can get the endorsement at GVSU at the undergraduate level, saving you significant time and money.



NEWS

‘English learners’ Enrollment Up 50% In Michigan Schools Over Last 18 Years

BY TOM GANTERT
JULY 17, 2025



What are the Benefits of a Spanish Endorsement?

Having Spanish on your résumé isn't just impressive, it's strategic. A Spanish endorsement can enhance and expand your career opportunities and meet the needs of increasingly diverse classrooms. Bilingual and culturally responsive educators are in high demand across grade levels, and this endorsement prepares you to teach Spanish as a world language or support multilingual learners in diverse settings. Spanish will strengthen your ability to communicate with students and families and serve in high-need schools. You will gain valuable **communication skills, intercultural competence, and real-world teaching strategies** that set you apart in a competitive job market. It will also open doors to leadership roles in global education. Whether you're passionate about language, social justice, or global education, a Spanish endorsement amplifies your impact and your opportunities.

What is a Capstone Class?

At the very end of your PCKET coursework, you will take a capstone course, **PCK 495**. In this course you will write a substantial independent research paper where you will investigate a disciplinary or interdisciplinary problem of practice in education. Many students start thinking about their topic while they move through the program. Often, students' topics grow out of the questions from their PCKET courses. Consider keeping a notebook of questions as you move through this program. What do you wonder about? What are you curious about? Note that if you are a **special education double major**, you will **not** take PCK 495 because you will take another capstone class related to special education.

How Does PCKET Connect to the Second Major in Education?

PCKET is offered through CLAS and is designed as a stand-alone major. This means that you can graduate with a PCKET degree if you decide you do not want to be a teacher. However, if you want to be a teacher, you must also graduate with a second major in either **Educational Studies (ES)** or **Special Education (SE)**. The combined majors lead to your teacher certification. The double-major program was designed in collaboration between **CLAS** and **CECI** faculty. We work closely together to align our courses so that you receive an excellent education and will be well-prepared beginning teachers. Courses with the prefix beginning ED (i.e., EDI, EDR, EDF, etc.) are your CECI courses. Courses with other prefixes (i.e., ENG, HST, MTH, SCI, HPE, MUS, ART, etc.) are your PCKET courses. The courses both within the majors and across the majors build on one another. You should notice that concepts are introduced in one class, further developed in another class, and eventually mastered in another class. It is a good idea to save all your syllabi to help you study for your **Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC)**.

Are There Opportunities to Work with Elementary Children?

Yes! Grand Valley's program incorporates several field experiences throughout the program. We do not wait for your apprenticeship semester! For example in a regular section of **MTH 226/326/328**, you'll spend approximately **three weeks working directly with children** in a local school applying your learning, and the rest of your time on campus. In a **community-based learning (CBL)** section, your class is embedded in a local elementary school—you'll meet at the school for class and regularly apply your learning through an ongoing, hands-on experience of planning and facilitating math activities with children throughout the semester. Currently, most of the field experiences are housed in Math and English, but you may have an experience with any of your classes. We know that quality teacher preparation must involve a clinically rich program of study by providing candidates with a deliberate series of structured clinical experiences that:

- Connect teacher preparation coursework to PK-6 students and schools
- Connect theory to practice from an immersion into the materials and practices of teaching

It is important to note that there are minimum field hour requirements, but your professor can require additional hours. You can be assured that GVSU's program exceeds the state standards for field experiences because we know that you will be better prepared to teach children by practicing with children.

Course with field experiences

PCKET
MTH 126 2+ hours
ENG 301 10+ hours
MTH 226 6+ hours
ENG 355 5+ hours
MTH 326 6+ hours
MTH 328 6+ hours

Educational Studies or Special Education
EDF 115 30+ hours
EDI 317 10+ hours
EDR 320 6+ hours
EDS 318 6+ hours
EDS/EDR 323 6+ hours

Are There Opportunities to Study Abroad?

Yes! The PCKET program provides several opportunities for students to earn credits in their major and 3-6 concentrations. The benefits of studying abroad include experiencing different cultures, expanding your worldview, building relationships, and learning about yourself. Having a study abroad program on your resume can help you in the job market. You can earn a **“Certificate of International Teaching Experience”** when participating in approved study abroad programs with a school field experience in the destination country. In addition to the study abroad experience, you enroll in **PCK/EDI 320** for 1-3 credits to earn the certificate. Your study abroad director can help advise you about the appropriate process.



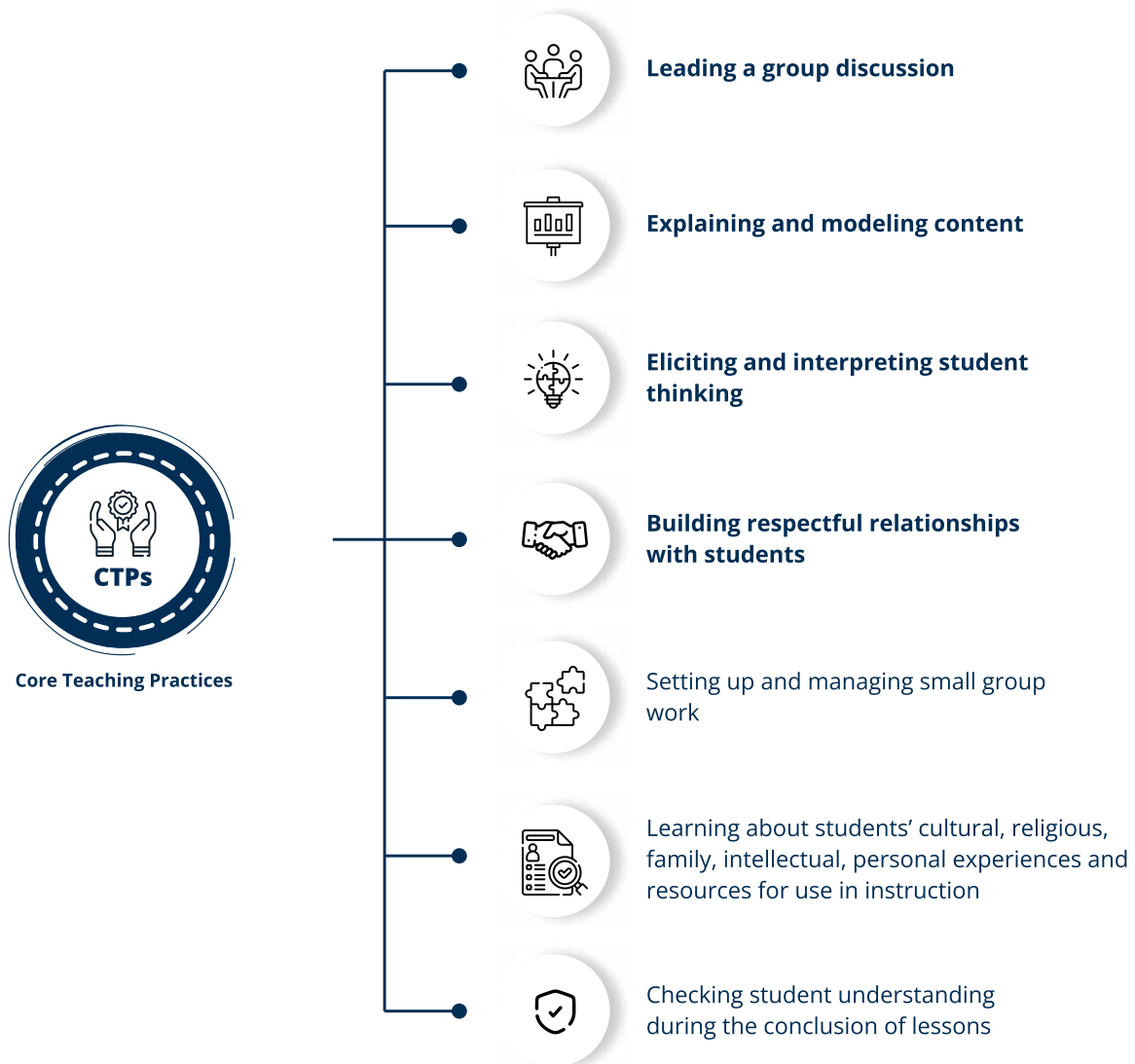
Where Can I Study Abroad?

There are several places where students can study abroad. Below is a simple layout of what to expect from each study abroad program.

Country	Term offered	Length	Course(s)
 Ghana	 Spring	4 weeks	ENG 301 ENG 401 or ENG 334 (English concentration)
 Tanzania			PCK 495
 Netherlands			ENG 355 ENG 401
 Ireland	Internship Student Teaching  or  Fall or Winter	4 weeks	EDI 432

What are Core Teaching Practices (CTPs)?

Michigan has identified seven **core teaching practices (CTPs)** that all candidates must learn to the level of **“proficient.”** You will learn about these seven CTPs in both your PCKET and ES or SE majors and have an opportunity to practice and reflect on these CTPs in your field experiences. Originally called “high-leverage practices,” CTPs are evidence-based and frequently used practices that, when implemented successfully, can improve learning for all students, particularly struggling learners. While there are 19 CTPs, the state of Michigan has focused on the following seven (identifying **the first four as most important**, which is why they are in bold):



Are classes only online in the summer?

No! In fact, very few PCKET classes are offered fully online (**asynchronous**). Some are offered in a **hybrid** manner, partially online and partially in person. Some are offered online, but you have to meet via **Zoom**. While we value flexibility for students to be able to return home and work during the summer, we also want to assure that you have a quality education, and many of our classes need more professor guidance than can be attained in a completely online, asynchronous format. Students often find it more valuable to stay at GVSU for the first spring term to take 1-2 classes and then return home to work the rest of the summer.

How does the PCKET major relate to the CLAS Voyage?

The CLAS Voyage was created to provide students with an engaging educational experience. All students engage in high-impact practices as a foundation for their educational journey. The CLAS Voyage's mission directly aligns with the PCKET curriculum. Inquiry and community-based learning and global experiences are highly valued in both the PCKET major and the CLAS Voyage. You'll hear more about the CLAS Voyage throughout the program.