

New Major Provides Help for Yancey Youth

What does an elementary school teacher do with a pupil who has already mastered all of the basic skills she was planning to teach him during the year?

Mrs. Jeanette Buckner, who teaches a combination first and second grade class at Bee Log Elementary School in Yancey County, faced that problem with one of her students, Adam Powers.

Adam, at his parents' request, was tested following Mrs. Buckner's realization that he had already mastered the rudimentary skills that the rest of her class was learning. He was found to have an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) in the "Very Superior" range of 130 to 200.

Yancey County school officials turned to Mars Hill College, which began offering this year a program to train teachers of gifted and talented Children. Smith Goodrum, assistant professor of education and director of the new major, selected two volunteers from his class to tutor Adam. They are Bob Anderson, a senior from Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., and Lisa Hood, a junior whose parents have been Baptist missionaries to Thailand for the last 12 years.

What Goodrum and his students found when they began helping Adam is that he is reading on a fifth grade level while his math skills are only slightly less advanced.

The answer to teaching the gifted and

talented, according to Goodrum, is not "more and better of the same." Instead, Bob and Lisa are leading Adam in a deeper exploration of the subjects on his own grade level, particularly in the themes and concepts his work contains.

"Adam has an amazing ability to memorize his work," noted Goodrum, which could lead you to believe that he understands it. We want to make sure that he understands the concepts behind the words and figures on the page."

Bob agrees, stating that, "If we were simply to give him fifth grade work to do, he would eventually become frustrated."

Lisa noted that she had some frustrations of her own in tutoring Adam that she had not expected.

"This is the first tutoring experience I've had, so I didn't know quite what to expect. There are times when Adam is absolutely amazing. He has an extensive vocabulary which he is able to use accurately; however, there are times when I have to force myself to remember that he is just seven years old."

Bob responded to that fact noting, "Adam understands concepts that normally occur when a child reaches the age of 9 or so. But then, like any child, there are times when he doesn't want to do school work but wants to explore a totally unrelated area that has caught his fancy."

One of the goals Goodrum and the college students are aiming for is that Adam's social skills and psychological development remain stable while his intellectual style is broadened.

Both Bob and Lisa hope they are instilling in Adam a desire to learn so that if he does remain with his class he will be able to explore topics on his own.

Although Adam's achievements are unusual, gifted and talented children like him are not uncommon. When Mars Hill officials considered adding the gifted and talented major, they conducted extensive research in several areas. They found that there are 100,000 to 110,000 gifted and talented children in the state, only one-fourth of whom are receiving the services of a specially trained teacher.

Mars Hill's new major is being developed with funds the college received in a \$2 million grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Advanced Institute Development Program (AIDP). Currently, Mars Hill is the only undergraduate college in North Carolina offering teacher certification for gifted and talented children.

Additional support for the new major came from the state legislature when it mandated that all teachers of exceptional children were to be certified in their speciality by June, 1977, and that all state-supported public schools must provide special education programs for

exceptional children by the 1982-83 school year. The Mars Hill researchers estimated that over 3,000 new teachers will be needed to meet this legislative directive.

Goodrum, in his own survey, which was reinforced by the Western Regional Educational Center, estimated that there are potentially 94 openings for teachers of gifted and talented children in Western North Carolina.

Mars Hill will be active in the region, according to Goodrum. There are workshops in the planning stage, including one this spring for directors and coordinators of gifted and talented programs. There is also the possibility of a summer program for fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders next year.

However, Goodrum explains that "Our tutors and student teachers are not substitutes for certified teachers. We hope that we can help in other areas such as identifying potential problems, helping to set up curricula, and serving as a resource facility. The curriculum needs for the gifted and talented also have a lot to offer traditional education, particularly in the methods of instruction and counselling."

"Mars Hill College was founded to meet the academic needs of the community and region." Goodrum points out, "and this program is an example of the even stronger commitment the college has to the region today."

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

"What means this glory round our feet,"
The Magi mused, "more bright than morn"
And voices chanted clear and sweet,
"Today the Prince of Peace is born!"

"What means that star," the Shepherds said,
"That brightens through the rocky glen?"
And angels, answering overhead,
Sang, "Peace on earth, good will to men!"

'Tis eighteen hundred years and more
Since those sweet oracles were dumb;
We wait for Him, like them of yore;
Alas, He seems so slow to come!

But it is said, in words of gold,
No time or sorrow e'er shall dim,
That little children might be bold
In perfect trust to come to Him.

All round about our feet shall shine
A light that the wise men saw,
If we our loving wills incline
To that sweet Life which is the Law.

So shall we learn to understand
The simple faith of shepherds then,
And, clasping kindly hand in hand,
Sing, "Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

But they who do their souls no wrong,
And keep at eve the faith of morn,
Shall daily hear the angel-song,
"Today the Prince of Peace is born!"
- James Russell Howell



The library Christmas tree lacks studious companions a week before exams. Photo by Kirk Hall