

# Education psychology aides assisting 'special' children

By SARAH E. WHITE

The small, fragile child sits on the worn green carpet on the floor in the middle of the huge schoolroom and clutches wooden blocks of varying color and size. Next to her on the floor sits the instructor who is holding her five or six special students.

The child occasionally identifies the color of the blocks aloud and receives praise in return. Her small uncoordinated fingers run quickly through the pile of playthings in the box. Minutes later her eyes are shiny and her lips pursed. The child cries. The instructor's compassionate hand consoles her, brushing matted hair once again out of her eyes.

Such is the scene in a special education class in the A&M Consolidated School District. The instructor is an aide, Terry Swanson, a senior in elementary education at Texas A&M University taking educational psychology (EPSY) 111 this fall.

The course was designed for university students to get practical experience working with handicapped and retarded children in the public schools, says Dr. Marty Abramson, the course instructor. He says these college students work with special education teachers for three hours a week and do whatever tasks are assigned them. The duties vary, from putting out pumpkins for Halloween decorations to tutoring a slow student in spelling or math.

Cynthia Sage, a sophomore in elementary education, works at South Knoll Elementary School three hours a week. Special (meaning mentally slow, handicapped or physically disabled) children are mainstreamed into a regular class. She says she sits with two students who need help the most and tries to keep them interested in what the teacher is saying. This is her first experience with working with special students and she says, "I can see progress in my kids already."

Some students just observe the teacher. Edna Ramsey, a junior psychology major, says that she observes the teacher handling the children most of the time, but she occasionally helps the students with their reading.

Ramsey says that EPSY 111 is valuable because of the experience students are getting with special children, but that the course should give more than one hour credit.

She says that special students are given more freedom to move around and more encouragement to play together than normal students.

Phyllis Perkins, coordinator for special education in the A&M Consolidated schools, says there are 15 aides from EPSY 111 on four campuses in this district. Most of them are placed with special education teachers, she says, and they are expected to perform the duties of a paid aide. They make teaching materials, decorate bulletin boards and tutor individual children.

Perkins says that having these aides has improved the special education program because it decreases the ratio of students to teachers. She says the experience is helping the A&M students involved as well because they learn more about special education by working in schools than they can by sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture.

Most EPSY 111 students agreed that the experience of working with these students is valuable.

"We want these volunteer aides to do with the children what we do and in the way we do it," says Jane

Barry, teacher of the severely handicapped students. She says that she has a method of dealing with each child and wants the aides to handle the children in the same way.

Lisa Clifton, a student in EPSY 111 and aide to Barry, is assigned to work with one handicapped child within a class of six students. Clifton is studying the child and developing programs for the child's development, Barry says. Each child is given goals to achieve, like eating with a spoon, neatly drinking from a cup, walking while holding on to a bar with one hand, staying dry, and smiling.

Occasionally Barry's class goes outside to gather leaves that have fallen from trees. Some children sit motionless, moaning or perhaps trying to form a word, while aides gather leaves for them. Other children slowly stuff the red, brown and yellow treasures into their wrinkled sacks, smiling proudly. These field trips would not be taken without the extra pair of hands that the student aides offer, Barry says.

The children are thrilled at having these aides working with them, says Perkins.

Next semester, however, EPSY 111 will be changed to a lecture, course and students will not enter the public schools as aides.

"We can't send them into the

public schools because we are going to fill up the public schools too quickly. We have only a certain

**"Special students are given more freedom to move around and more encouragement to play together than normal students."**

number of slots that students can go into. We don't want to shove them into schools right away as we did

## Book wins regional award

"Tales of the Big Bend," by Elton Miles and published by the Texas A&M University Press, is the winner of the Border Regional Library Association's 1977 Southwest Book Award for Nonfiction.

The 179-page folklore book was written by the professor of English at Sul Ross State University and former president of the Texas Folklore Society.

Miles and the Texas A&M University Press will be formally cited at the association's annual awards banquet in El Paso Nov. 5.

this time but we want to give them skills and knowledge gradually and work them up to the student teaching plane," Abramson says.

The generic special education program at Texas A&M, which is in its first year, has three faculty members and enrollment will stay small, Abramson says.

With individualized instruction, Texas A&M can produce a better quality of special education teacher, he says.

"We think a special education teacher is special so therefore we want the better students," he says.



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