

They learn by helping at Madonna's center

By Kathy McPhail Friedrichs
staff writer

Three first-graders, gathered around a small table in a brightly decorated classroom, read aloud slowly and carefully from the simple daily journals they have been keeping.

They are getting an exercise in reading and comprehension in a program designed to nip in the bud some early reading difficulties that have surfaced. Madonna College's Psycho-Educational Center is the setting for the program. It is a facility that serves children with learning and reading problems, and its instructors include students in the Livonia college's teacher education department.

Sister Mary Martina, Madonna faculty member and program director, said most of the children who attend have problems with visual perception or auditory skills. These could cause reading difficulties later on, she added. There are some can't recognize words quickly. Others may not remember words after learning them. Some get letter sequences mixed up.

Then there are the ones who can't remember the words they've heard. They lack "auditory perception," Sister Martina said.

AND HELP is available through a variety of remedial techniques.

There's the CRAIG Reader, which flashes words on a visual screen to help develop speed and accuracy in perception. Or teachers may use flashcards, memorization or writing tasks during the hour-long tutoring sessions.

For auditory problems, there are tapes instead of screens to help the young students improve their skills.

The Psycho-Educational Center has recently acquired a large number of

cassette tapes to aid children in developing listening skills. Tapes cover subject areas of interest to children, like sports, featuring notables such as O.J. Simpson.

"The largest number of children who come have auditory skills which are not sufficiently developed so that they are able to make the connections necessary for reading," said Sister Martina.

Major handicaps, however, are not the focus of the center's program. "Only 30 percent of the children in the program have severe problems," the director noted. "Most have common needs and can be helped through small groups."

Individual tutoring sessions also are available for more intensive remedial work.

THREE BASIC services are provided by the center for children ages 6-18. First there is an evaluation including psychological, hearing, reading and vision tests. Then comes diagnosis of the nature of the student's learning problem. Finally, the center staff develops an individual remedial study program.

Students are usually referred by teachers or schools in the greater Detroit area. Sometimes, though, parents take initiative to ask help for their children, Sister Martina said.

Tutoring classes are offered throughout the school year before and after regular school hours, and on a more intensive daily basis during the summer.

Costs for the program are a diagnostic fee of \$50 for testing and program construction, and session fees of \$7 an hour for small group participation, \$10 an hour for individual counseling.

TWO PURPOSES are served by the center, its director said. It gives the

community needed remedial reading programs and it also is a laboratory for Madonna's student pre-service teachers.

And its programs probably have a lot to do with the coveted re-accreditation recently won by Madonna from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

"The Psycho-Educational Center is one of the strengths of the Teacher Education Program," said Noreen Daly, head of the education/psychology department at Madonna.

After a rigorous two-year review, the college was granted a maximum eight-year renewed accreditation for its bachelor programs in the preparation of elementary, secondary, and special education teachers.

The college was cited for excellence in faculty, curriculum and multi-cultural orientation in preparing teachers for both public and private schools. It is one of 16 Michigan colleges and universities to volunteer for the review and win approval.

The Psycho-Educational Center also gets high marks from the participating teachers.

Louis Brooks, a teacher consultant at Thurston High in Redford, called it "one of the best aspects of Madonna's education program."

Even though Brooks has a master's degree in teaching the emotionally-impaired and has been in special education for 16 years, he finds the center a structured and refreshing learning experience.

"It is a great model for my own teaching," he commented.

MARY ANN BARREA, a teacher of English-as-a-second-language at Stevenson High School in Livonia, teaches at the center while fulfilling practicum requirements for a speciality in learning disabilities at Madonna.

She is particularly impressed with the diversity of the program and the individual attention children receive.

"Both private and small group sessions are offered, and that is very beneficial for the students," she said.

The teacher-student ratio averages three-to-one and never goes over four-to-one, she added.

Since its creation in 1952, the Psycho-Educational Center has grown to

127 students and 41 staff (including in-service teachers). About half of the teachers at the center are fulfilling class requirements, and half are hired just for the summer.

Mary Zagorski of Plymouth is a teacher consultant with the Westwood School District who has been hired to teach for the last three summers. She returns primarily because she is impressed with how much the children progress during the five-week summer program.

The Psycho-Educational Center is located in 16 rooms on the ground floor of the east wing of Madonna's residence hall. The Curriculum Library Instructional Materials Center is just down the hall and is also used for classes during the school year.

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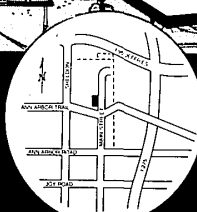
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