

College students learn from fourth-graders

by Linda Vogt
Adviser, The Clackamas Print

This is the first story I have ever written for the student newspaper in my nearly seven years here as a journalism instructor and adviser. But I want to share a wonderful experience I had last week, watching students from the newspaper staff reach beyond their everyday lives and become teachers themselves.

A week ago, 17 of us from The Clackamas Print staff piled into the college van and two other cars and headed out Beaver Creek Road to Clarkes Elementary School, about 10 miles away. We were going to see our fourth-grade pen pals, and to teach them some journalism skills so that they can do their own news show on video.

The college students had already exchanged pen pal letters with students in Leslie Woods' fourth-grade class. Upon our arrival in the classroom, the fourth-graders tried to contain their excited energy as they speculated "Which one is my pen pal?"

My students introduced themselves, and one by one the fourth graders got up from their desks and went to stand by their college friends. From that point on, there was no need to do anything to create a connection; it happened spontaneously. There was so much excited conversa-



Photo by Anjanette Booth

The Clackamas Print staff poses with Leslie Woods' fourth-grade class during recess. 17 college students visited their pen pals at Clarkes Elementary School, and helped teach them basic journalism skills.

tion that the room reverberated with it, and smiles were many.

The college students had divided themselves into groups to teach basic journalism skills: news writing, feature writing, interviewing and fact vs. opinion. The fourth-graders rotated from group to group, and the session took about an hour. During that

hour, The Print staff members left behind their status as students and became the teachers, and the fourth-graders couldn't get enough.

What I observed during that session was that my journalism students can move very easily into the role of mentor and teacher. Perhaps, for them, it was a welcome change. How often do our college students get that opportunity? All day long on campus

they sit at the desks, they do the assignments, they either know or don't know the answers, they cope with the stress of going to college, working, being parents or daughters or sons. For two hours, those roles and responsibilities were suspended, and instead, these 18- to 26-year-olds were, to the fourth-graders, the most wise, wonderful people on earth! It made me smile, just walking around the classroom and seeing that change

happen.

It happened out on the playground, too, when we joined the fourth-graders for recess. This is what I saw there: a tall student and a short student, swinging in tandem on the swing set; two fourth-graders at one end and one college student at the other end of the teeter-totter; Frank Jordan, who is 6 feet, 8 inches, playing basketball with little people half his height, and amazing them endlessly with his ability to stuff the ball into the basket -- yet giving them room to score often; college students climbing on the playground equipment with their fourth-graders, and coming down the slide for the first time in 10 years. All this happened with the bright winter backdrop of sparkling white snow and blue sky; it was quite a sight!

The hardest part of the day was the leaving; the fourth-graders sang us a song, hugged their pen pals, asked us when we would come again, and then waved goodbye and went reluctantly back to their classroom.

We piled into the van, turned up the oldies on the radio, ate bagels and cream cheese and traveled the 10 miles back to the college through snow-covered fields. But I suspect that we all came back changed just a little; it's very powerful to be the most special person ever to a child.



Photo by Anjanette Booth

Frank Jordan gets to know his pen pal Jeff. Frank helped teach the students how to write news stories before playing basketball with them during recess.

Dear Jason,
What do you do in the Clackamas Print?
My hobbie is to read Nintendo power books.
My friends are Matt D. Matts, corey, Greg W.
how many friends do you have. I like to draw.
Do you like to work at Clackamas Print?

Sincerely,
Greg Logan

But I suspect that we all came back changed just a little; it's very powerful to be the most special person ever to a child.



Photo by Anjanette Booth

Daniel Mala sits with one of the fourth-graders. Daniel was involved in teaching the interviewing process to the class.