

# Ed facilities transcend simple academic use

Derik has just turned nine and he has a problem convincing people that he goes to school at the University of Alberta.

But indeed he does, as do nine other children seven boys besides Derik and two girls from the Edmonton Public and Catholic School Boards. Their school is the learning assistance classroom located in the Education Centre at the University of Alberta.

Derik and his friends are children between the ages of eight and 11 who just didn't seem to be getting anywhere in a regular school setting yet are of normal or even above normal intelligence and do not have any severe emotional difficulties or physical handicaps.

Children with learning disabilities you might say but their teacher would rather you didn't. Mrs. Shirley Tanasichuk, on loan from the Edmonton Public School Board to teach the class which started last fall, explains. "I dislike the term it conjures up too many different connotations... some of them very wrong," she says.

She prefers to refer to the children as "students who were working significantly below their grade level - behind at least two years."

What caused them to fall behind their fellows in academic achievement? "If we could exactly pinpoint the problems we would know better how to treat them but unfortunately we can't always exactly pinpoint the reason," she says. She does point out a basic problem the children seem to have in common a low self-concept. They tend to be defeatists.

Combined with this, a number of children have a perceptual problem of sorts. They don't always hear or see things the way other people do. Sometimes they have difficulty discriminating sounds in words and often read "saw" as "was" and "no" as "on".

By giving the children more individualized attention, making use of the technology available from the Edmonton Public School Board and three from the Edmonton Catholic School Board was reached.

The university location of the classroom has a number of benefits. For one thing, it allows access to the university's

technological resources. One of the children's favorite activities is using the universities educational research services computers for a supplement math program.

For Mrs. Tanasichuk, the university location means that an expert is always close at hand. "If I want to consult somebody about a reading problem, or maybe an educational psychologist there's somebody down the



hall," she says.

The university location also means that selected university students in the Faculty of Education under the guidance and direction of well-qualified specialists have the opportunity to work with the children. The university students are involved not only in helping the class with reading, math, music, social studies and art, but also with recreational activities and emotional development.

One wall of the special classroom designed to facilitate individualized instruction or small group activity is equipped with one-way mirrors for observing and videotaping the children without distracting them from their school work or play.

A school day for the children is not all work. Recess and noon hour are usually times of vigorous play activity supervised by university students. Pupils can also earn free-time periods in which they can leisurely read or play educational games. In addition, specially planned field trips are organized whenever possible. The class has gone out for a

picnic and taken part in the Christmas concert and party at a regular city school. They also had their own Hallowe'en and Christmas parties.

The parents' reaction to the project has been, on the whole, positive. A parent-teacher night was held in October and was quite a success in terms of the parents observing and understanding what is being done for their children. In November a questionnaire was sent out and the feedback was generally quite positive.

One of the disadvantages of the class setting is the fact that the children lack the number of playmates that children in regular schools have. But, as one mother indicated on the questionnaire, "the fact that he

enjoys school so much and is interested, works harder, and goes willingly far outweighs the fact that he misses playmates."

In order to better prepare the students for their possible placement in either a special or regular class setting next fall, some will attend regular afternoon classes in their home schools. One child is currently doing so. The pupils leave the classroom only after colse consultation among Mrs. Tanasichuk, school board per-

sonnel and the parents. Even then, close contact will be maintained by the learning assistance classroom staff and those responsible for the students' education in his new program.

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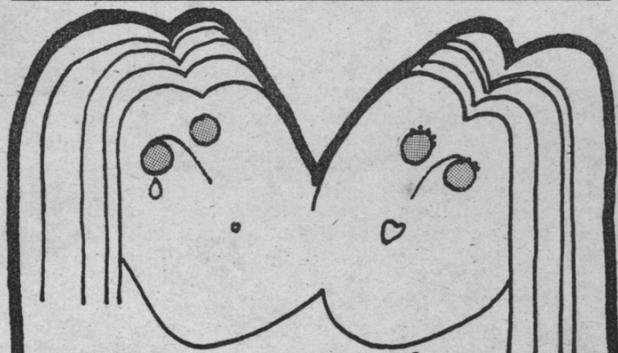
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