

Summer in inner-city is a challenge to grow

This past summer I taught reading skills, math, arts & crafts and a little Bible studies to fourth-grade kids at Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church's Summer Program. The kids were from Piedmont Courts, a low-income housing project in Charlotte. I was one of four Stapleton/Davidson interns working with people from inner-city Charlotte. It was the first year of the internship, which was established through the generosity of George Davidson Jr., '39, and his wife Anne Stapleton Davidson, and was supervised by a committee from First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte.

Teaching was new to me. Working with bad-mouthed, undisciplined and unmotivated children was even newer. Doing all of this without air-conditioning topped it off nicely. The first two days I questioned how I could have possibly thought this was what I should do with my summer! At times, the energy, enthusiasm and love required to teach these children seemed more than I could handle. I am proud to say I not only survived, but actually came to enjoy the job and especially the kids! These same children were amazingly clever at times. They taught me their priorities and the importance of flexibility and compromise. They showed me that even children which at first glance seem completely hopeless as pupils can be intelligent, helpful and even motivated if placed in the right circumstances with support from others.

Starting my first day of teaching, I was openly challenged. With few exceptions, the kids never asked me to help them or to see things they'd accomplished—they told me to. Regardless of what we did or who had suggested doing it, everything was "boring." And one boy repeated the ever-so-encouraging phrase "I hate it" several times everyday.

Discipline and respect came only after I exploded in rage and frustration one day with the line "Who's the teacher in this room?!" When I planned special field trips or did special things for the kids, they did not express gratitude but instead complained of what I had not done. They seemed to think the world owed them something—an attitude I still cannot understand since I was taught the exact opposite. At first I feared I was simply inadequate as a teacher. I took the treatment personally and wondered how I could improve. However, I soon realized that I was simply being tested, and that persistence and determination would be needed to pass.

I learned that these kids weren't used to being able to count on anyone and were reluctant to trust me. The second day of the program, one of my better-behaved kids asked me if I would be returning the next day. She

was serious. At the end of the week, one of my troublemakers made a point of telling me he'd see me Monday, and I almost cried—not out of sadness, but out of happiness and relief. I knew then that he knew he could count on me to show up on Monday and wanted me to know that he would show up too! That one statement let me know that what I was doing mattered. The kids did care; they were not hopeless. I could be of some use to them.

It horrified me at first that such young children were so aware of violence and drugs in our society, but considering the neighborhoods where they live, it did not amaze me. Their awareness may be the only factor which saves them from drug addiction, teenage parenthood and lives of crime later on. It comforted me to learn that their favorite music groups and songs were frequently those which openly opposed the crime-ridden, drug-filled world which they have accepted as the norm in their neighborhoods. It thrilled me to hear some of them discuss the importance of education and a belief in God as factors helping them improve themselves and their socio-economic status in society.

From my observations, and discussions with the kids in Seigle's Summer Program and with Charlie Summers, its pastor, I am convinced that much of these children's problems in school with concentration, discipline and performance can be traced back to no bedtimes, little supervision and little or no breakfast before school. Although this may sound simplistic, it makes sense if you think about it. I know I am irritable and unproductive when I try to function without adequate sleep and nutrition, not to mention the effect of scary and disturbing TV programs and movies! However, I learned that though these particular differences between the home situation of the kids from Piedmont Courts and my own are unfortunate, many of the cultural differences between us are simply that—differences—and their culture is no less interesting or important than mine.

I believe we as the "middle and upper classes" of society frequently assume that if we could only teach the "lower classes" our priorities, our values and what makes sense to us, then they would be able to pull themselves into an improved socio-economic situation. What I think we find all too easy to believe is that our culture is somehow better than theirs. I would like to propose that I no longer believe that. First of all, any culture's food, music, religion and way of life is innately of vital importance to those belonging to that culture simply because it is their culture! If someone tries to rob a people of those things which seem

natural and right to them in the name of their own interest, it is like telling them that not only are they disadvantaged economically and educationally, but that they are disadvantaged emotionally and spiritually as well. We certainly cannot expect a group of people to gain the confidence, self-esteem and motivation needed to help themselves by telling them they are worthless!

I think we would find a much lessened drug problem in our poorer communities if we had more of these kids growing up in an environment where they felt they were important contributors and where they knew that their initiative would be rewarded. People use drugs to escape a world with which they feel they cannot cope—people sell drugs to have a lifestyle they feel they cannot obtain otherwise. It struck me many times that the poverty-stricken people of Piedmont Courts could manage fine without our sympathy and handouts, but would benefit greatly from our time and talents in teaching them skills, acknowledging their donations to society and encouraging and helping to facilitate their advancement educationally. I hope more civic groups, churches and government agencies will soon take on the attitude of "helping people help themselves" rather than trying to help with aid which wins immediate battles but totally avoids the war.

Last summer was probably the best summer of my life. I learned so much about a culture within our society with which I was formerly only peripherally acquainted. I even came to, in some small way, understand that culture and its problems. My internship helped me develop as a person. I know myself better now. I know my personal limitations better now. Most of all, I regard myself in a different way now. I feel more confident about my ability to assist others who find themselves in distressing situations. I contemplate issues of poverty in a more open-minded and informed fashion. Finally, I am more aware of the established agencies and programs which assist those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and how to work with them. I recommend the Stapleton/Davidson summer internship and similar opportunities to all Davidson students. The ways to learn and help are numerous and the rewards are beyond expression.

Jerrilyn Woodard is a senior psychology major from Wilson, N.C.

Cultural diversity: Davidson needs and can change to benefit all, not just minorities

Several weeks ago I attended the first open SGA Senate meeting. One topic of discussion was the minority issue at Davidson. Last year this was a prevalent issue that stimulated opinions from both sides of the aisle. At the core of this problem is the antipathy to attract and retain minority students, faculty and administrators; and the lack of ethnic-related courses. With this in mind, I address several questions. Does Davidson need to change? Does Davidson want to change? And, how can we change?

I believe that Davidson critically needs to change. We need to diversify the student body, faculty, administration and our curriculum. Davidson is a liberal-arts college and, as such, one of its primary goals is to liberate one's mind from ignorance. One way to accomplish this is by exposing students to a consortium of ideas, thoughts, situations and, most importantly, people. While we do expose students to a healthy assortment of ideas and thoughts, we are certainly not exposed to a variety of people. In terms of composition, we are very homogeneous.

Davidson's population and curriculum is not reflective of our society. This homogeneity is entirely contradictory to our liberal-arts philosophy. The college does its students a great and irreparable injustice by maintaining this homogeneity. In keeping with the best interest of our students, it is judicious to attract and retain minority students, faculty and administrators and to incorporate into our curriculum a variety of courses relating to minorities. Let us not forget what our Statement of Purpose expresses: "Davidson wishes to engage in those activities that 'liberate mankind physically, mentally, and spiritually.'" If we want to be faithful to our liberating philosophy, we need to change.

I have spoken to many students, professors and administrators about Davidson's commitment to change. In the past, our administrators have echoed this need. I ask: is their commitment sincere? I do not know the answer. However, I do know that there are students, faculty and administrators, not all of them being minorities, who have a sincere commitment and

are presently carrying out this pledge. President Kuykendall maintains the Faculty Advisory Committee for Minorities to assess minority issues. With the minority issue incumbent on us, this committee, of which I am a student representative, does not have a chairperson and has not convened in the two months since school started. If we are to change, we must have a sincere and concerted effort. We must have an honest commitment from our students, faculty and administrators. We need the faculty and administration to lead us.

I believe that, with a commitment from our students, faculty and administration, Davidson can change. I call upon the Dean of Admissions and his staff to attract and recruit minority students. There is a pool of minority students, albeit relatively small, from where to draw. Recently, our administration decided to increase the student population by 200. It is prudent to

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