

After School Pilot Program

"Children learn how to think"

by Trina Trice, staff writer, Clayton News Daily (Fall 2006)

When DeMarco Burton goes to the toy store, he knows exactly how to find his way.

He has a system. He takes note of all the toys he passes on the way to the toy he wants to see. Once he's done, he follows the trail of toys back from where he originated so that he can find his mother.

That kind of systematic thinking is what some Morrow Elementary School students are being taught in an after-school enrichment program facilitated by the Southeastern Center for the Enhancement of Learning (SCEL), said Jan Burnett, SCEL facilitator.

"We wanted to help children in need of a little more assistance," added David Head, Morrow Elementary School principal.

Through cognitive enrichment, SCEL sharpens cognitive or thinking skills to improve a child's cognitive functioning, which should improve academic performance, according to Dr. Martha Wood, SCEL founder and director.

A retired Clayton County educator, Wood was originally hoping the principles of the SCEL program could be incorporated into Clayton County School's curriculum, but due to budget restrictions, the addition isn't possible, Wood said.

For now, she'll have to settle for the pilot program at Morrow Elementary School, which nine fourth- and fifth-grade Morrow Elementary School students take two afternoons a week.

"It's not a tutorial in specific content," Wood said. "We're aiming a little deeper than that. We're telling children they're learning to be better thinkers.

"A lot of times, we assume children who are performing at a low level academically are not capable of learning. But it's proven that these learning skills can be taught."

Burnett can already see a difference in her students, she said.

"During class I asked them, 'What have you learned?'" Burnett said. "Malik (Willis) said, 'Things aren't always what you think they are.'"

Burnett and fellow SCEL teacher Gina Selvaggio want students like Willis to examine what they see to make good choices, keeping in accordance with the class's motto: "Just a minute, let me think."

The class is currently working on exercises that consist of a sequence of dots with shapes hidden within them.

“It’s fun, we got to connect the dots,” said Kimberly Lim, SCEL and Morrow Elementary School student.

Through the SCEL exercises, students are learning lessons that they can apply to life, helping them to become lifelong thinkers and to curb making impulsive decisions, Burnett said.

It’s about taking time to think to prevent making errors, and to bridge it (the curriculum) to their lives,” Burnett said.

Peggy Jones enrolled her daughter Brianah Jones in the class originally to get her involved in extracurricular activities, Jones said.

“I try to get her in a lot of activities, things that will in the long run help her and help me,” Jones said. “And she’s enjoying it a lot. Her attitude has changed, too. She’s more helpful and she’s thinking now before she says things or does anything.”

Brianah agrees with her mother.

“I think it’s pretty exciting. I’m having a great time,” Brianah said.

What to know The Southeaster Center for the Enhancement of Learning began a pilot after-school enrichment program at Morrow Elementary School. For more information, visit the Web site at www.scel.org.