

Meet Millsaps

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DELTA KIDS

Dr. Kamilla Bahbahani's Early Literacy I and Field Research in Reading class has put principles of elementary education into circulation—to the tune of 6,300 readers every week—with the Clarksdale Press Register's Delta Kids page, which is aimed at fostering literacy among children in the Mississippi Delta. The page is distributed in Coahoma, Bolivar, Tallahatchie, Quitman, and Tunica counties, and other newspapers have expressed interest in creating a similar page.

The Delta Kids page reaches into approximately 50 school settings, including GED classes, according to Flo Larson, Newspapers in Education coordinator for the Press Register. NIE circulates the paper to about 3,700 children every Tuesday, in addition to the daily paper's regular readership, Larson said.

Last summer, Larson spoke with Dr. Connie Schimmel, chair of the education department at Millsaps College, and together they conceived of a project that would deploy Millsaps students to help create exercises for the paper's existing education page, which has incorporated standards for the Mississippi Curriculum Test into games and activities.

From there, Bahbahani, assistant professor of education, asked her students to develop integrated sets of activities that would link subject areas and allow students to learn and use new knowledge in multiple ways.

These educational activities are popular with readers of all ages, encouraging development of language and math abilities, Bahbahani said. "For example, Millsaps students might select a related set of vocabulary for a week's worth of activities," Bahbahani said. "They would use these words in multiple ways, figuring out their meanings, using the words in context, and finding antonyms or synonyms."

The page has a readership that extends beyond the schools, Larson said, with readers from all walks of life constantly writing in requesting

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answers to what are often challenging and sophisticated brain teasers. "In one case, a local doctor sent word for me to put the answers in the paper!" Larson said.

And educators seem pleased with the results. "We were able to use it for supplementary activities for second, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, both for large and small groups and individual work," said Susan Berryhill, principal of St. George's Episcopal Day School. "The information that the kids received was good, and it was personalized. I also think the activities were varied enough to keep the children interested and stimulated."

"It is an extremely effective program because it's tied into the educational curriculum that is taught daily by teachers in our district," said Sadie Dorsey, assistant superintendent and federal programs director for Clarksdale Municipal School District. "When Millsaps students intervened, personalities were revealed and structure and content improved."

The Millsaps students, who had bylines in the paper as contributing editors, worked to create multidisciplinary activities, linking math problems with language arts concepts, and exploring science through new vocabulary, Bahbahani said. Jokes were used to help students work on skills of prediction, understand cause and effect, recognize order in language, learn about parts of speech, and find ways that words can be used.

The students critiqued one another's work in small groups, received feedback from the professor, and then revised their projects before publication.

Jewel Johnson, a junior from Houston, Mississippi, took part in the Delta Kids project and reports her experiences here.

— J.W.

By Jewel Johnson

The class listened attentively as Dr. Kamilla Bahbahani enthusiastically explained that we would all be creating individual activity pages to submit for publication into a small Mississippi newspaper. Although some students had experience submitting activities for the newspaper from other classes, I was one of the few students who had not.

With the help of education department professors, students design activities in areas such as math, reading comprehension, language arts, social studies, and science according to the Mississippi Department of Education's standards and curriculum. Teachers in the Clarksdale area use the page as an educational resource in the classroom.

My initial thought of the assignment was one of excitement. I would not only have the opportunity to tutor students in reading, but also to develop exercises that would enrich their classroom experience. As I began searching for samples of various subject activities, I realized that it is not an easy task to create new and original learning activities. Normally, I am a bit of a procrastinator, but I was so excited about the assignment that I started working on it immediately.

After a couple days of reviewing sample activities and previous Delta Kids pages, I felt ready to begin my own. Beginning with the language arts section, I decided to design a homophone activity. My directions asked students to match the homophones (e.g., *plane* and *plain*), and in the following activity to complete sentences using the words they matched in the previous activity.

These first exercises were not difficult to design, but I had trouble thinking of



When I submitted my completed Delta Kids assignment, I knew I had done my best, but I was not altogether confident in my work. So I decided to take copies of my activities to third grade students I tutor in reading as a field test for the exercises.

The students enjoyed working the activities, and I finally felt a bit of pride and confidence in what I had created. To my surprise, a few weeks later, my very first submission was chosen for publication on the Delta Kids page. These activities were the result of hard work that Delta Kids

page readers do not see.

While creating activities was a fun learning experience, it took a great deal of work. And that work was worth the reward of knowing that children would benefit.

other fun language arts activities, so I decided to skip to the math section. After writing several word problems, creating a number pattern exercise, and designing a series of multiplication problems that were required to solve a riddle, I was finished.

The most difficult section for me was geography. I had no idea what to include in this section. Since the assignment was not due for another week, I could afford to take a few days to brainstorm, and that is exactly what I did. When I began working on my Delta Kids assignment again, I had decided to create an activity using Mississippi counties. As a child, I loved word scrambles, so I chose 10 counties, and scrambled their names. In the next exercise, I asked the students to match the counties from the word scramble with the county seats I had listed.

This geography section gave me an idea for a final language arts activity. Choctaw County was one of the counties I used in the word scramble. I searched the website of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and found information to use in a reading comprehension exercise. The exercise included a paragraph about the history of the Choctaws and comprehension questions for students to answer.

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