

## Four grades set own pace

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FULLERTON — Walking into room K-D at Orangethorpe Elementary School is like walking into a childhood dream. There are no rows of desks facing a chalkboard, no ditto sheets and textbooks.

Room K-D holds an unusual group of 31 youngsters ranging from kindergarten to third grade. Parents are welcome and the ones that can work as volunteer helpers.

Teacher Marian Nordberg and Arlene Bowen, her assistant of 12 years, teach the youngsters in a class which has "evolved" over the past 10 years and offers an alternative learning situation.

The choice of Miss Nordberg's class and type of teaching for their children has been made by parents within the Fullerton Elementary School District. It is the only such class in the district. Many children spend the full four years there, learning at their own speeds, taking the responsibility for learning, Miss Nordberg said.

"I encourage them to work at the one thing they do best. If it's writing, then

### News Tribune Photos by Jose Luis Villegas

they learn reading and math at the same time. Sometimes a child is so 'gung ho' on a project he doesn't want to stop."

Over the four years, she said, she knows that each child will "even out" and enter fourth grade with the skills required, with a good sense of self-worth, tolerance for differences in others and the ability to deal with setbacks.

The room is alive with animals, games — and constant learning. One corner looks like Las Vegas, as three boys play "Race for Real Money," and learn to trade money and receive change.

Two other boys, Mike and Cy, are taking apart and putting back together the class anatomy mannequin named "Herkimer" — which means "human body" in German.

Arie, 6, sits on the floor working three-digit multiplication problems, as Jeff, 5, also works on his math, which consists of problems that kids two years his senior often can't solve.

The children in Miss Nordberg's class are first brought in with their parents to visit the class in action. If both the parents and the children like the class, a new student may be enrolled.

Many children stay in the room from kindergarten through third grade. They learn at their own pace. Some may take five years to go through, while others do it in three.

"There are no pressures and they set their own speed," Miss Nordberg said. "If they don't pick up something the first year, they'll learn it the next."

Each day the children must work on their reading, writing, and math. Though there are reading books, there are no textbooks or workbooks.

"We give them blank paper and they create," Miss Nordberg said. "They know what to write."

Each child has his own "books," which start as a folder of blank pages. Math problems are placed in these books each day and after they are solved they are corrected by a teacher. There are no wrong marks. If an answer is incorrect, the child reworks the problem until receiving a correct mark.

"It's an all-positive situation," said one mother, Jeanne Whitehouse. "Nothing is negative."

Each child owns a self-made dictionary. When a new word needs spelling, it is written into the dictionary and used for future reference.

One youngster, Michael, wanted the word "um" in his dictionary. "Um?" asked Miss Nordberg. "Yeah, like 'put um in jail,'" Michael replied. "You mean 'them'?" Miss Nordberg asked. "Oh, yeah," came the reply.

A child usually will excel in one or two areas that he puts his heart into, Miss Nordberg said. And besides reading, writing and math, each child has other responsibilities.

About half of the students have adopted silkworms. To "adopt," a child must agree to keep the silkworms fed and cleaned, as well as provide a foster parent in the case of absence. The child then becomes a part of the whole life cycle of the silkworm. This year's silkworms are last year's eggs, Miss Nordberg explained. Care for the silkworms, or any other living being, is a top priority.

"First thing every morning, you take care of your silkworms," said Sally, a first year student.

Many other pets add character to the room. The birds include male and female cockatiels Sunny and Cloudy; a baby crow, yet unnamed, who is fed a combination of Gerber's high protein baby food, vitamins and antibiotics; and a ground dove.

A tarantula, "Fangs," came to K-D three years ago, at age 3. One summer, Fangs escaped from his cage in Miss Nordberg's mobile home, and ended up on exhibit in the clubhouse before she could catch up with him.

Chad and David recently brought in a foot and a half-long alligator lizard to

Combined kindergarten through third grade class taught by Marian Nordberg at Orangethorpe Elementary School, Fullerton, offers parents option of alternative to the traditional structured classroom for their children. It is only one of its kind in the Fullerton Elementary School District. Program developed over 10 years, enrolls some 30 students each year.



COCKATIEL 'SUNNY, JEFF SPINDLER, 5½, COMMUNE



EVEN BIRDS CAN'T DISTRACT CONCENTRATING MIKE PEREZ, 6, TEACHER MARIAN NORDBERG

"share" with the class. But when sharing time arrived, the lizard was nowhere to be found. Five days later, the lizard showed up in the room and was safely recaptured.

Chincha, the chinchilla, is yet another pet.

Sunny and Cloudy often roam the room freely, perching on the shoulders and heads of the children.

"Cloudy likes feet," Holly explained as the bird nipped at her shoes.

"He also likes earrings and hair," said Debbie, as the bird picked at her earrings

when transferred to her shoulder.

Miss Nordberg hopes that someday Cloudy will lay eggs, but that won't be until Sunny gets old enough to mate.

The class incubator has kept many eggs until they've hatched. Once Christa brought in an egg that her younger brother had found. Just as Miss Nordberg was about to give up hope on the egg, out came the "miracle duck," who was born crippled, but soon grew stronger and was taken home as a pet.

Human studies are left to Herkimer the mannequin. Brian, a second grader, recently did research on Herkimer and parts of the human body.

"The brain is like a postman," his research concluded. "It carries messages to other parts of the body ... If you were all brain, you would be very, very smart!"

He also researched the respiratory system: "If you didn't have your respiratory system, you sure couldn't breathe very good," his report stated.

What about the eyes? "The eye is a nice thing to have. If all humans did not have eyes, people would often bump into things ..."

For writing experience, the kids must write about every picture they draw. One youngster, Mindy, once "wrote" wavy lines under her picture because she had not yet learned to write. She took the story to the assistant Mrs. Bowen to proof read. Mrs. Bowen then sent the story to Miss Nordberg, who had Mindy "read" the story to her.



COLUMBUS THE RABBIT IS A DISCOVERY FOR HOLLY AVIS, 6½



DANNY SPINDLER, 7, KRISTA STEINKE, 6, READ TO DUCKY FRIEND