

CCGA Seniors work with Students to Understand Fluency

By ANNA HALL The Brunswick News

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College of Coastal Georgia education student Kaitlyn Riggins works with Goodyear Elementary School fifth-grade student Zakiya Bostic on her reading comprehension. Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News

Zakiya Bostic was fully engaged in the story in front of her, reading aloud to her tutor about a house falling from the sky and landing on a wicked witch.

The classic scene from “The Wizard of Oz” was a prime teaching tool for the 10-year-old student at Goodyear Elementary School being put to use thanks to her tutor, Kaitlyn Riggins, a senior education student at College of Coastal Georgia.

Riggins and Bostic meet up during the last hour of school every Thursday as part of an ongoing joint educational workshop between the elementary school and the college.

“The house spins and lands on her? Wow,” Bostic said, entertained by the time the two shared reading the story.

Bostic, like many students in her age range, is a sufficient reader. But she lags behind in fluency and pronunciation skills.

Those elements of literacy are the primary reasons why the cohort of education students from the college come together every Thursday in the Goodyear cafeteria to meet with selected students.

“See here, when the sentence gets exciting, we use a higher pitch in our voice to show that something big is happening,” Riggins said, coaching Bostic through the reading session.

Surrounding the reading duo were some 30 other tutors from the college, each working one-on-one with a fifth-grader from Goodyear. The weekly tutoring sessions have been arranged by Ron Reigner, a professor in the School of Education and Teacher Preparation. He is holder of the Community-Supported Professorship in Early Childhood Reading and Language Arts.

All the tutors with the fluency and literacy enhancement sessions are double majoring in elementary education and special education.

“It is one thing to learn about teaching in the classroom, but having this time set aside every week to get to know one student, to get to know their needs, that’s a whole other thing,” Reigner

said. “The education students will have skills they need to really understand how to address special needs in the classroom.”

The 14-week tutoring sessions not only prepare teachers for in-the-field action, but they also double as a method of teaching the fifth-grade students in the program more about depths of literacy they will need to know once they reach higher grade levels, Reigner said.

“We are working with students to teach them about pronouncing words, about really understanding the text they are reading,” he said. “It’s like the difference between reading in Spanish and understanding what you are reading in Spanish. I can read Spanish words all day long, but if I have no understanding of what those words mean and can’t use my voice to emphasize words at the right time, then I am not really understanding the text. We want kids to be able to read, yes. But we really need them to read and understand what they are reading.”

If Bostic and Riggins are an indication of the expected outcome, the program is working. Since the duo began working together at the start of the school year, the pair has built a strong relationship, with Bostic expressing her growing love of reading.

“It’s my favorite part of the week, when we get to sit together and read and then talk about what we read,” Bostic said.

For Riggins, the experience is just as special. She has been able to connect with Bostic on both personal and professional levels, coming to understand the student’s reading preferences.

“She loves the ‘Goosebumps’ series, and she really loves the whole idea of a classic story,” she said.

She said she feels ready to get in the classroom.

“Every week, we get a little further along with our reading, pronunciation and fluency, so every week is a step in the right direction,” Riggins said. “I feel lucky to have had this experience.”