

CCGA Education Students Tutor in Summer Reading Program

By ANNA HALL, The Brunswick News

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College of Coastal Georgia education majors Brandy Ferrell and Nicole Harmon were learning just as much as their student, Lawrence Dobson.

The two educators to-be are enrolled in the School of Education and Teacher Preparation. They are both early and special education majors who are part of a cohort of teacher hopefuls taking part in the college's "Teaching Reading: Grades 3rd to 5th" course, under the leadership of professor Ronald Reigner who again this year coordinated and is leading the program.

Dobson, a rising fifth-grader at Altama Elementary School, studied with the two tutors Wednesday, as part of the six-week program being held twice a week on the college campus.

Holding a book about penguins, Dobson shyly explained all he had learned during this one hour-long session, which is a key mission of the tutoring program.

"Penguins, they live in Antarctica, where it's cold. They can't live here," Dobson said as he recited information held in the book.

Watching as the youngster worked to comprehend the material in the book, tutors Ferrell and Harman encouraged him, leading him through the so-called K.W.L. model on the classroom board.

The strategic model — which essentially works through what a student knows before reading a book, what they want to learn from the book, and what they learn after reading it — is a text structure, one of many teaching elements tutors in the class are learning from Reigner's instruction in their own course.

"One of the great parts about this tutor program is we have real, hands-on experience without a totally structured class setting," Ferrell said. "We see how to put these models into motion."

It's essential for students in the third- to fifth-grade age group, who are the students in the tutoring sessions, to master reading at that age, as before third grade, children learn to read. But after that age, they are reading to learn.

"This is a key turning point for students," Ferrell said. "Before we can fully get into classrooms for instruction, this is an important step we need to understand and know how to put into practice."

Children being tutored in the summer program are bused in from The Rock, a child care center under the guidance Akeba, a privately owned preschool and after-school program on Altama Avenue, which is where the students came from last summer for the program. Reigner opted to move to The Rock, as it worked better for a drop-in option for attending the tutoring sessions, he said.

While books are a central focal point of the six-week program, other educational tools have come into the fold. That includes 13 Kindle e-readers, each with 25 grade-appropriate works of fiction, nonfiction and poetry, which were purchased with a grant from service-learning at the college, Reigner said.

"That is totally new this summer in the program," he said. "We are using the Kindles with technical support to work on pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading strategy instruction, as well as just for pleasure reading."

Some tutors are also actively using their own personal laptops and educational websites such as www.pbskids.org or www.readingrockets.org for kid-friendly teaching ideas, games and strategic study habits, he said.

Reigner also added, the summer tutoring session offers prime student-to-teacher ratios, as there are 24 tutors serving 19 children. That's a benefit for both sides of the classroom coin, he said.

As he saw last summer, tutors in his course have truly stepped up to the chalkboard to assist local school children in developing and sustaining proper classroom habits as well as foster a love for reading and learning.

At the same time, the tutors are creating within themselves a solid foundation for identifying students' needs, creating educational solutions and building a pathway for success in the classroom upon graduation.

"I'm so proud of these tutors and just as proud of the students they are working with," he said. "We found great success in this summer program last year and are seeing that mirrored here again. It's important for upcoming teachers to have the ability to put theory into practice and that is precisely what we are doing here."