

Calvin Rife teaches life .. and school

by CAROL ANDERSON
Nebraskan Staff Writer

"I didn't really expect any trouble from the kids, and I haven't had any," said Calvin Rife. "Outside of a few amusing incidents involving some curious children, nothing much has happened."

Rife is currently student teaching at Ruth Pyrtle Elementary School in Lincoln's fashionable Wedgewood Manor. But being the only black person in the upper middle-class school has presented no particular problems.

"One boy asked me if I was an athlete, and he seemed disappointed when I said I wasn't," Rife said. It's good for blacks who don't carry a football or bounce a basketball to interact with whites to destroy the stereotype that "because you're black you must be better at athletics," he added.

On another occasion, Rife was concerned about a little girl who seldom spoke up in class. Even when asked, she was reluctant to talk.

"I never seemed to be able to get a response from her," Rife said. "But one day after class she turned and said simply, 'you're nice.' What more could I ask?"

Young students are often unexposed to minority people so it's easy for faulty stereotypes to be formed, Rife said.

"Having me for a teacher exposes the kids to somebody who looks a little different, but who treats them with respect," he continued.

Rife emphasized that he is trying, as an educator and as a human being, to help his students to grow and develop. He wants to make a difference in somebody's life, and that's why he's teaching kindergarten.

"I feel I'm accomplishing something," Rife said of his seven weeks at the school. "It's just something you sense. A lot of good teaching goes on that way."

Rife said that young kids who aren't exposed to diverse elements of society "miss out on something." For instance,

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black kids lose by going to school with all black kids," he said.

Besides being exposed to black teachers, Rife said young students ought to be exposed to more men teachers.

"It's not that there are too many white teachers, or too many women teachers," he said. "I'd just like to see more men and more black teachers on the elementary level."

Rife said his teaching training at the University was

generally good, but elementary education courses should be expanded in several areas. He would like to see more courses on how to teach other than middle class children.

"One of the main weaknesses of any teacher, black or white, who is going out into society today is a lack of understanding of themselves," he said. "This can lead to a lack of understanding and consideration of the children they are working with."

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