

up the down staircase daily—from both sides



by Nancy Stohs

Every day, senior Peggy Sintek attends a class from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. that has 22 instructors.

They aren't the usual college instructors. They don't have Ph.D.'s or M.A.'s because they've never attended college. They are addressed as Dan or Cindy or Andrew, never "Mr." or "Miss," because they're 10 and 11 years old.

And what's more, if you told them they were teaching the smiling, dark-haired lady in front of the room anything, they'd think you were crazy.

But for student teacher, "instructors" like the fifth grade class at Clare McPhee Elementary School in Lincoln are invaluable.

This is where Peggy Sintek of Scotia, an elementary education major, practice teaches.

It is 7:15 a.m. when she walks into room 209. Children won't arrive for an hour and a half, but there are lessons to prepare for, dittos to run off.

Children start arriving about 8:45 a.m. Another day of student teaching for Sintek is about to begin.

Reading is first on the agenda. Today she asks small groups of students, each to describe to her a book they recently read. Sintek is attentive; the students are enthusiastic.

"Okay, do we have some listeners now?" begins Mary Gilliland, the class' regular teacher. Despite the open classroom atmosphere of McPhee, they settle down and listen.

The last class for Sintek to teach is mathematics. "Today we're going to play fraction solitaire. Let's all take out our cards."

She explains the game to the students and walks from table to table, helping those who don't understand.

Staying for lunch isn't required, but Sintek said she likes to get to know her students, so she stays. The students seem to enjoy the chance to talk about "normal" things.

Time to leave the make-believe world of a teacher for another day and return to the role of a college student.

For Sintek, it's a busy one. She is a second semester senior carrying 17 hours. That means some afternoons in class from 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. She also manages the Abel-Sandoz swimming pool and spends three to four hours daily out of class preparing her lessons. For her half days of student teaching she receives eight hours credit.

Sintek is only one of 522 UNL student teachers this semester—178 in elementary education and 394 in secondary education.

She is part of one of UNL's oldest forms of apprenticeship learning, which began with the founding of Teachers College in 1908.

According to James May, dean of elementary student teaching, practice



teaching is a state requirement for a teacher's certificate. Senior standing and a 2.25 cumulative grade point average are required for student teaching, in addition to completing required teaching classes.

Requirements in secondary education are the same, except that the student's major is one of 13 specialized areas. He also takes fewer classes in Teachers College.

Typically, students in both levels student teach half days for a semester for eight hours credit. Bert Alfrey, dean of secondary student teaching, said this presents problems: "He (the student teacher) is not really a student and not really a teacher."

Secondary education is experimenting with a program in which students teach full days for 15 hours of credit.

Assigning a student teacher to a school and cooperating teacher is rather complex. A decision must be made from requests by teachers and students and recommendations of professors. Time, location of the school, grade level, type of teaching and biography of the student are then matched with an open position.

Despite conflicting interests, "the welfare of the individual student comes first," May said.

Most students in elementary education are then sent to one of 30 Lincoln public schools, but some go to Omaha or neighboring small towns to practice

(Continued on page 3)