

“History of CHA Discovery Program”
recalled by Mr. Ralph Bullard

In 1985, Mr. Don Bartlett delivered a message at the ACSI conference in Dallas, Texas, entitled “Macaroni at Midnight.” He shared his first-hand experiences of the heartbreak and defeat of having learning difficulties. In the message he challenged Christian schools to consider opening their doors wider to those students who have learning differences. That evening our faculty gathered with Mr. Ralph Bullard, Headmaster of Christian Heritage Academy, for devotions. The faculty discussed what had been heard that day. Many were particularly impressed by what Mr. Bartlett had said. Together, the faculty committed to be open to God and His possible leading in this area.

Two years later, Mr. Bullard attended an administrators’ conference in Winona Lake, Indiana. Several sessions were conducted by Grace Mutzabaugh, a founder of the National Institute for Learning Development (NILD), on various subjects pertaining to learning difficulties. Mr. Bullard had not planned on attending sessions on learning differences, but found that he was attending most of her sessions. Upon hearing what she had to say, he sensed that he was dealing with truth, her teaching didn’t just sound good, but it seemed right.

During the conference, Mr. Bullard had opportunities to visit with Grace Mutzabaugh. He listened as Miss Mutzabaugh described how the child with learning difficulties is perceived in the classroom. She used the words lazy, inattentive, disinterested, “plain smart- just won’t do anything.” In his mind, pictures of the faces of particular students began to appear--students whose problems had been discussed in various faculty meetings. These were the very words which had been used to describe them. Thus far, the school had offered nothing for them but more external pressure: detentions, late slips, parent conferences, etc.

The educational therapy represented by NILD was demanding, requiring hard work, and dealt thoroughly with the aspect of reasoning. Through the conversations with Miss Mutzabaugh, Mr. Bullard began to realize that the educational philosophy of NILD was totally compatible with the educational philosophy of Christian Heritage Academy. At that point, he decided that the school must investigate this avenue more thoroughly.

The NILD offices put Christian Heritage into contact with Mr. Tony Ryff, Program Coordinator of the Discovery Program at Blue Ridge Christian School in Kansas City, Missouri. In January of 1989, the administrators of Christian Heritage went to Kansas City to spend the day observing and visiting with Mr. Ryff. There was a consensus that this was the path in which our school was to go. Our first therapist, Mrs. Lorrie Colbert, received her NILD training in the summer of 1990 and our Discovery Program began that fall.

Mr. Bullard states that he personally had been prepared by God for this type of program in our school. He had learned about the hurts and needs of children who have learning problems through personal experiences. Mr. Bullard had experienced speech impediments himself as a child, and his third child was born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate. He began to see that God had providentially given him first-hand contact with children who had special needs. After realizing what the child with learning differences faces in the classroom, he was able to reflect back to what it was like and how those same feelings had been experienced by others whom he had known and loved. Mr. Bullard says that he had not tied any of this preparation together until Mr. Bartlett's message. He states, " This was God's providence. He prepares well in advance for the things He wants to come about."

In conclusion, Mr. Bullard sees the establishment of the Discovery Program as a clear illustration of what we are teaching about God's providential history. It is an up-to-date personal revelation of His providence within our lives.