



Accumulating 30 hours of graduate credits beyond her master's degree requirements, Mitchell valued and applied the principles she learned.

"Butler stressed setting standards, making lesson plans, having objectives to achieve your goals and how to measure progress," she said. "I ran into good teachers at Butler. They had patience and helped us understand how to do things."

She was also motivated by seeing veteran African-American teachers attending evening classes at Butler. Some who had taught Mitchell in IPS received their bachelor's degrees the same year she did.

After two decades as a teacher, Mitchell served as principal for Schools 72 and 67. She didn't enjoy that role as much, she said, "because I only saw the misbehaving students. I didn't get to hear the good news."

Later, Mitchell joined the education faculty at Stanford University in California. While there, she was offered an opportunity she had long hoped for — the chance to travel to Africa to teach as a visiting professor at the University of

A Very Special Educator

by Mary Ellen Stephenson

For more than half a century, Martha Connor Mitchell, Ed.D. '45 M.S. '60 of Indianapolis has fulfilled her high school ambition to help people. She earned a bachelor of arts in sociology at Butler in 1945, with plans to become a social worker.

At that time, however, few African-Americans were hired in that field. So she became a substitute teacher in the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). Eventually offered full-time teaching, she went on to educate and mentor students from preschool through university level on three continents.

In May 2010, the College of Education honored her with a Distinguished Alumni Award.*

"I was proud of seeing children grasp what I was trying to get across to them...seeing the lights come on for them," she said, recalling her early days of teaching middle school social studies.

She often based lessons around common human experiences, such as food. Hazel Hart, former Butler dean of women, invited Mitchell to present her methods in a city-wide teacher workshop. She also offered mini-classes to her students' parents, enabling them to help their children with lessons.

Mitchell earned her master's degree in education from Butler in 1960 and her doctorate from Columbia University.

Legon in Accra, Ghana. She also visited Nigeria and South Africa and presented workshops in Israel and Italy.

Returning to Indianapolis in 1978, Mitchell worked eight years as a curriculum consultant for the Indiana Department of Education. She then founded Building Blocks Academy preschool, which she operated for 13 years. She also created the Center for Leadership Development to mentor African-American high school students in college readiness.

Asked what advice she'd offer today's education undergraduates, Mitchell said: "If you don't enjoy teaching, find something else to do. A salary shouldn't be your only criteria to enter the field. Evaluate yourself, so that your students don't miss the boat. Be willing to put in extra hours. I'd like to have a school where bells never ring."

**Amy Knerr '92, a sixth-grade mathematics teacher at Clay Middle School in Carmel, Ind., also received a 2010 COE Distinguished Alumni Award. Knerr has earned national recognition for her work, including a BrightVision Award and the Presidential Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching 2009–2010 Award, presented in January at the White House.*