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CD Means Creative Dramatics

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CD Means Creative Dramatics

Dordt College offers four courses in Drama, among them Drama 262, a course in Creative Dramatics for Children. This is the third year that CD has been offered at Dordt. It is taught by James Koldenhoven.

Drama is often thought of in very limited terms. The word usually makes us think of a stage, a play, and an audience. None of that is true, however, with CD. Normally with Creative Dramatics there is no audience, never is there a play or playbook to begin with, and it is inadvisable to practice CD on a stage. The whole process deliberately avoids theatricals.

What makes CD different this year from other years at Dordt is the presence of children, one hour a week, for demonstration purposes. The children are bussed in from the local Christian School. During the first half of the course the demonstrations are conducted with second-grade children. Sixth graders will be used in the second half of the course. The college students in the CD course observe the demonstrations, and sometime during the semester, go out into surrounding schools and spend a few hours trying their hand at CD leadership.

The first objective a leader has in working Creative Dramatics with children is to establish group and individual concentration. This goal, though emphasized during the early sessions, is never dropped. Concentration is necessary for the fulfillment of the other goals. Stacking imaginary beanbags is one activity that develops concentration.

A second goal, also begun in the beanbag activity, is the development of sense awareness. As the children

stack the beanbags for example, they imaginatively sense the weight and visualize the size, color and shape of the stack. There are many other kinds of activities available for accomplishing these goals, and the college students have opportunity to see and do many of them in a semester.

Arguments could be advanced that CD is an art in itself, even a subject in itself, like mathematics, but the approach taken at Dordt College is that CD is a supportive art. This means that once a class of children knows thoroughly what Creative Dramatics is, they can then begin to use aspects of CD for the study of other subjects. Without having developed some skill in CD, it is nearly impossible to work out problems in social science, or language arts, or Bible, dramatically. But it has been established that the creative approach to certain concepts and situations is the best approach.

Creative Dramatics has limitations. It is not a fast way to discovery. It might take a teacher and a group of junior high children three or four hours, even if already skilled in



CD, to make the Valley Forge experience with George Washington a fully developed experience in the lives of the students. Nor is CD scientifically or historically precise. CD uses, for instance, only a few of the essential facts of the Valley Forge history, then creates a situation that includes those facts, and in the "playing out" of the situation adds whatever seems natural. No one knows, for instance, how each individual soldier felt during the long winter at Valley Forge, or how he felt at a specific moment. But in the CD reconstruction, the extreme cold and the lack of food will prompt imaginative, but very natural, responses in the children involved.

Creative Dramatics is not all "playing out" of a situation. If four hours were required during a unit in American History to work out the experience of Valley Forge, a total of an hour would probably be spent in reading and research, one hour in playing the situation, and two hours in discussing the progress and development of the experience.

There are about eighty students taking

Creative Dramatics this year at Dordt, most of them elementary education students. The class meets three times a week. The first meeting deals with the theories and principles of CD, the second is a lab session in which the college students participate in CD, and the third session is used for demonstration. Field experiences will take the college students as far out as Pease, Minnesota and New Holland, South Dakota. Invitations to the students have been extended by teachers in public schools, and both Catholic and Reformed Christian schools. Once a student accepts an invitation, he or she is responsible for making arrangements with that teacher and for transportation. Invitations were initially solicited by the instructor of the course in Creative Dramatics. Solicitations were made to 280 teachers. About 115 teachers returned invitations, of which eighty were accepted. Except where long distances are involved, students are expected to conduct two sessions in the field, with the same group of children, sometime in October or November.

With or Without Purpose

Faculty members at Dordt College move about on three legs. Take away any of the three legs and he or she becomes a cripple. These three legs are knowledge, communication, and the Word of God. Coordinating these legs so as to walk and talk a straight line is no easy task, particularly when someone comes behind you and mumbles, "You're not using your legs properly," or "Hey, you've lost your third leg." Imagine a two-legged stool teaching in a Christian college!

This is a homely way of introducing a series of reports which we plan to publish in subsequent issues of Pro Rege.

In 1971 the president of Dordt College called for the formation of a special committee to get at some basic issues. Informal discussions had deteriorated, or even disappeared, over a question that had never really been formulated well. Some of us, for lack of knowledge, others for lack of discretion in communication, were really walking like two-legged stools, but the issue seemed to center upon the question of what is the Word of God.

That sounds quite serious, but maybe it is a compliment to our faculty, for it might well speak to the sincere desire on our part to be certain that God's Word is relevant to us in