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Incidentally

by James Koldenhoven

The B.J. Haan Lecture Series 1985

Early April spring days offered a warm welcome to three guest lecturers invited to Dordt College by the Studies Institute. The guests were Dr. Harry Van Belle, Dr. Maarten Vrieze, and Dr. Richard Buckham. The three men presented papers on Anthropology and Education as a sequel to the series of lectures given in 1984 on the topic of instruction.

In his introduction to this year's lecture series, Dr. John Van Dyk reviewed the purpose. He suggested a four-year first stage to develop a theory of instruction—what is it, and how does it work. We hope this effort will help Christian educators to become more fully conscious of what is happening in theorizing about instruction and to identify false or idolatrous views.

Dr. Harry Van Belle, Professor of Psychology at Redeemer College of Hamilton, Ontario, gave the first lecture entitled "Relational Anthropology and Education." Van Belle discussed his views on integration, disclosure of meaning, and office, by selectively criticizing aspects of Herman Dooyeweerd's distinctions related to the religious nature of the person. Alternately converging and diverging with Dooyeweerd's views, Van Belle set forth the disclosure process in instruction as a religious process of interpersonal relationship. Although Van Belle's probing of several themes in Dooyeweerd's thought did not clearly resolve what he thought were central issues, his clarification of the relationship between teacher and learner stirred

much interest. Rejecting interactionism, Van Belle asserted that the teacher-learner relationship is intimately interpersonal rather than intrapersonal. In his concluding section, Van Belle examined education and culture, historical change, and the notion of symbolic reflection in school activity. As a conclusion, Van Belle recapped his paper by emphasizing that instruction is essentially symbolic disclosure of meaning in God's creation.

Dr. Maarten Vrieze, Professor of Philosophy at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois, presented a paper with reflection on "Learning—A Matter of Mandate, Solidarity, and Situation." Vrieze quarreled with the notion that theorists can construct models of instruction as though one can scientifically get at what happens with instruction. Even a biblical model is a construct that is only an approach to what really happens. Vrieze asserted that the education of our covenant children should not be fixed entirely within such a theoretical construct.

With reference to Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, Dr. Vrieze clarified humankind's mandate to do meaningful work while listening for the wisdom of God. In this context, Vrieze reflected on the theme of solidarity—fundamental human interconnectedness that comes to expression in contemporary society or human situationality.

From these elements—mandate, solidarity, and situationality—Vrieze brought out their respective implications for the school.

Instruction must lead students to be involved in a mandate, in assuming responsibility in solidarity education, and in assuming tasks in various situations. In his summary, Dr. Vrieze suggested that education must be ethical. Instruction is ethical accompaniment. A teacher takes a child by the hand in a caring way and leads. Like Van Belle, Vrieze emphasized the close relationship between teacher and learner. For Vrieze, it is an ethical *subject to subject* relation.

The final lecture of the series was given by Dr. Richard Buckham, Psychologist, Alpha Counseling Services of Bremerton, Washington. This last paper was entitled, "Structure and Direction in Educational Anthropology." Dr. Buckham opened his discussion with the distinction that structure in creation poses the question, what is (the nature of things)? Direction in creation was shown to ask, What are persons to do? Both of these questions need to be answered from reflection on human existence and educational practice.

Education was defined by Buckham as an agent. Persons who teach are agents and a person can be his/her own agent in educating self. The educational agent has a formative influence or action on a recipient. Instruction is given to develop confidence, competence, and responsibility in children in order to carry out a Kingdom task.

In a spirit of warning, and urging reform, Buckham outlined dynamics which hindered or thwarted the educational process. Identifying the restricting problems of conformity, rigidity, and ritualism, Buckham showed how a school that is structured with these ills will displace confidence, competence, and responsibility.

Buckham enlarged on the topic of educational anthropology by setting forth his "Basic Modes" for human development. Using each letter of "Basic Modes" acrostically, Buckham illustrated the processes he felt were components of the instruction process.

Buckham asserted that simple knowledge of these processes, or having adequate perspectives on instruction, will of itself not bring us to normative educational practices. In the concluding section of his paper, Buckham described what he calls directional factors in educational anthropology. Buckham became practical in showing aspects of educational practice that retard normative process. In contrast, the redemptive dynamics which bring renewal and reformation of educational practice were recommended.

Learning as defined by Buckham is an educational process that is the "relatively permanent acquisition or modification of action tendencies and/or activities that enable a person to behave in appropriate ways, given the norms or goals of the educational agent." Buckham concluded his paper by indicating that instruction can best be brought about in conditions of fellowship, faithfulness, fruitfulness, freedom, and fairness. These dynamics were urged as a process, including self-examination and reform to more normative educational practice. The lecture series was supplemented by two in-depth discussion meetings attended by the visiting lecturers, Education Department members, and members of the Studies Institute.

Eugene L. Westra