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B. J. Haan Lecture Series

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Incidentally

by James Koldenhoven

The B.J. Haan Lecture Series

Presented in late September of 1983 was the first of the academic year's series of lectures for faculty and students. The purpose of the B.J. Haan lecture series is to focus discussion and initiate research and action on educational concerns. The lectures presented by four Dordt College faculty members were inspired by a common interest in the twin processes of learning and instruction. Dr. Larry Reynolds, Professor of Education, began the series with a description of instruction. He presented five vignettes which illustrated different kinds of instruction with some of their possible long-range learning outcomes. His review of the current scene in the area of instructional theory emphasized the technological direction that instructional theorizing has taken. His thesis that instruction is a formative activity intended to enhance the response capacity of the creature to God's creation underlies his emphasis on the need for Christian educators to question the presuppositions about learning and instruction extant today and to analyze the impact of technology on a developing theory of instruction.

Reynolds introduced two Christian critiques of the impact of technology, one each by J. Ellul and E. Schuurman, as a possible basis for defining a Christian theory of instruction. Unless technology is properly related to the human task in creation, it is likely to reduce instruction to a set of techniques and the instructed to enslavement to a tool. Concern for the freedom of the

learner and the teacher in her or his cultural task in creation and for the development of discipleship in both prompted Reynolds to discuss instruction as it involves pedagogical authority and the relationship of teacher and learner as two image bearers working in a sin-scarred world. Reynolds concluded his presentation by challenging educators to engage in dialogue on the nature of formative activity with a view toward the refinement of a Christian theory of instruction.

Dr. Kenneth Bussema, Associate Professor of Psychology, delivered the second lecture entitled "Developmental Considerations For A Theory of Instruction." In his presentation, Bussema emphasized the linkage of educational theory to developmental theory and the importance of cognitive development and self-concept development as a framework for a theory of instruction. Having defined the fundamental principles of development as structure and interaction, Bussema defended the view that man is a cognitive creature and that the child is inherently predisposed to formulate an orderly view of reality. Elaborating on the themes of structure and interaction in development, Bussema reviewed the cognitive stage theory of Jean Piaget and the cognitive processing approach of Jerome Kagan. He explained both the benefits and the limitations that each of these approaches has for Christian educators attempting to understand the totality of a child's development and the implications of the develop-

mental process for instruction and learning.

Relating cognitive development to the growth of self-concept, Bussema briefly introduced his second developmental theme. Current research by Damon and Hart, he pointed out, represents advancement in understanding self-concept development. The dimensions of continuity, distinctiveness, volition, and self-reflection are crucial to the understanding of one's own identity and these dimensions interact developmentally with the physical, active, social, and psychological self. In simple words, children grow in understanding of who they are and what they can do. By examining the themes of cognitive development and self-concept development, Bussema showed how developmental psychology can help articulate a theory of instruction.

The third presentation given by Dr. Paul Moes, Assistant Professor of Psychology, was subtitled "What On Earth Does It Mean To Learn!" Moes proposed that there is one unified process common to all learning situations. He assumed that all learning operates within the parameters of created principles, and, that, therefore, learning always reflects a fundamental change in the understanding of God's creation. This implies that learning automatically involves the whole being, or the "application of the heart," as Moes expressed it. Having established that as his position, Moes briefly reviewed the history of learning theory beginning with classical and instrumental conditioning. Then, following the rise and fall of strict behaviorism, new directions in learning theory appear with the cognitive theorists. Moes evaluated both behaviorism and cognitive theory using Biblical directives as the standard, including the assumption that learning involves the whole person. A Christian theory of learning, according to Moes, must consider that learning is more than a cognitive enterprise, that information processing is guided and not haphazard, and that sin perverts learning.

The last lecture in the series was given by

Dr. Gloria Goris Stronks, Associate Professor of Education. Stronks demonstrated in her lecture how a Christian theory of instruction based on the thesis established by Reynolds in the first lecture and supported by findings concerning intellectual development affects curriculum and instruction in the middle school. The middle school concept, as a replacement for the junior high school concept, has been only tentatively accepted by Christian educators, according to Stronks, either because of a devotion to content-centered traditional methods of educating found in the junior high schools or a skepticism about what appears to be a humanistic, child-centered concept of learning in the middle school. She asserted that Christian educators must make changes in curriculum and instruction because neither the child-centered middle school concept nor the content-centered junior high school can meet our educational needs. In order to have meaningful change and appropriate curricular development, educators must know about the uniqueness of the learners' characteristics at given levels of development. Stronks presented a substantive review of the work of stage theorists and brain periodization researchers, placing particular emphasis on the work of Epstein. It has been reported by Epstein that the brain grows in spurts and that at these times the person is able to absorb new kinds of intellectual input. During the times of slow growth it is hypothesized that the new learnings have a chance to mature. Since periods of rapid and slower brain growth have been associated with age levels, the educational implications of the research are apparent. Stronks concluded her lecture by presenting a comprehensive curriculum design for middle school students. Subject matter, learning outcomes, skills, and teaching techniques were all considered in the proposed curriculum, but Stronks emphasized that it is the nature of the learner that must be known and acknowledged by those designing the learning environment.

A formal, prepared response was given to each lecture in the series and opportunity was provided for discussion. Since the purpose of the series was to generate discussion and action in the community of Christian educators, the audience included local educators from the Christian elementary schools and high schools as well as Dordt College faculty and students. Mr. Lewis Arkema, principal of the Orange City

Christian School, responded to the last lecture and enthusiastically committed the educational leaders of the local Christian schools to the process of curriculum development. It is hoped that the first of the B.J. Haan lecture series will result in greater cooperation among Christian educators at all levels of service.

Marian J. Vander Ark

Stair/Bouma Lectures

On November 14-15, Mr. Mike Stair of the Theatre Arts Department and Dr. Gerry Bouma of the Music Department presented lectures about learning. Their coordinated presentations addressed the question of how a student learns. Negatively put, their announcement carried this title, "We Teach, They Learn; Failed Logic in Contemporary Education."

Mike Stair's critique of teaching/learning suggested that we "hold to the empty vessel concept of education—the transmission of knowledge." He added, we have "a love affair with the great body of material—the compiled sum total of all human knowledge." This idea of a mass of knowledge, Stair believes, comes from the assumption of a Western notion of conflict, an "awareness of opposites" that originated with the fall of man. Modeled this way, we separate the student from creation. The student is in space "A" while knowledge is in space "B." Somehow "A" must acquire "B." The model depends on conflict and separation.

Stair proposed that "what man knows is no more separate from who man is than the mind is separate from the body." Our ability to think, said Stair, has offered what seems to be a solution: we create symbols to take the place of pieces of reality, we "construct symbols of things apart from the things themselves." As a result, we are twice

removed from experiential reality, first by being separate from it in model (and mind) and once more by introducing symbols to take the place of reality.

A better way to perceive reality, said Stair, is to regard it as a whole and the student as being one with the whole. Stair appealed to a Biblical model of wholeness this way: "To perceive a relationship with God . . . is to understand that when we know something, the something has become us, because we and the something are in a dynamic creating moment under the same creator."

Gerry Bouma's lecture focused on the relationship of the conscious and sub-conscious and the interaction between the two. He introduced the concept of the "servo," a programming device of the human being which manages information. He pointed out that the "sub-conscious is the location of the servo or guidance system." Teachers can influence the way the servo manages information. If the teacher reinforces creative interest in knowledge, the servo will respond positively. That information is organized in the learner and readily retrieved. On the contrary, when the teacher fails to acknowledge creative interest or fails to reinforce it, the information may be lost in the sub-conscious, or at least harder to retrieve. Bouma pointed out that the servo is programmed most effectively internally by