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Stair/Bouma Lectures

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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

the learner. Teaching is at best a sensitive awareness of the creative interest of the learner.

Like Stair, Bouma attacked the Western misuse of analytical thinking which often ignores the "more holistic creative thinking process." Because it is easier and because it has been made our model, a person in crisis will "automatically 'rut' into analytical thinking." He added, "Schools must encourage but cannot force creative thinking."

Together, Stair and Bouma suggested first, that students should "study" what relates

to them immediately, pragmatically or theoretically; second, that teachers should utilize the innate motivation; and third, schools should avoid thinking of "product" or product "labels," even if that product is labeled "disciple of Christ." Finally, education should not be seen "as a preparation for life, but as life itself—just as any endeavor should not be viewed as separate from the experience of living it."

James Koldenhoven