

Art lab

Trying to develop creativity



Everyone had a chance to look through the big lens to see how a camera works during a recent art lab for grade school youngsters at the University of Oregon. UO students acted as instructors while a group of local children, aged 6 to 12, embarked on their careers as film-makers.

A tow-headed 10-year-old licking an all-day lollipop is not the sort of person you expect to see in a university classroom, but it was commonplace this fall when 35 Eugene and Springfield school children enrolled in an art lab sponsored by the University's Department of Art Education for its student teachers.

The children, first through sixth graders, spent each thursday afternoon on the campus. They worked in a variety of media, but probably their most exciting venture was film-making.

In small groups, using makeshift costumes and props in an outside setting, or with puppets they constructed themselves using scraps, a little paper mache and a lot of originality, they created half a dozen "low budget" films.

The still cameras, super eight millimeter cameras and tape recorders were those available in the department for student use, and all the materials they used for the term were bought with the \$2 fee charged each child who participated.

While the completed films weren't lavish productions, and although some plots were a little thin and camera work shaky, the dialogue was spontaneous and youthful imaginations had a field day.

The five-man companies that shot their films outdoors had some problems with lighting. It was dark and skies were overcast, so their film didn't turn out too well, but they erased it and tried their hands at cartoon animation instead.

While none of the films will be nominated for Oscars, one of the student teachers, Robin Del Rosso points out that creating a polished product wasn't the goal of the class.

"What we were trying to do in the class was develop creativity, not just teach kids to use media, or arrive at the answer to a problem by using rote memory. The process he uses in arriving at an answer is more important to the child than the answer itself.

"This kind of teaching takes intense preparation," he says, "and means learning something about individual kids, their feelings and interest."

Graeme Chalmers, University faculty member who directs the course, agrees that the course should give youngsters the opportunity for creative experiences while the University students have the chance to learn firsthand what it's like to teach real, live kids.

Katherine Ross, a junior in Art Education, points out that before the children in the art lab

could begin their camera work they had to learn something about the use of texture, color, shapes, and "seeing" or framing the scenes they planned to use. They also had to learn to operate the cameras.

"The first step," she said, "was to help the children view the world around them. Before transmitting the picture onto film the child has to see the picture."

Miss Ross admits it was sometimes more difficult than she had anticipated. "My expectations of myself were too high," she said. "I thought I would never lose patience, always have things under control." In reality, she said, the children were sometimes restless after a day in school, their levels of maturity varied greatly, and the sheer force of numbers sometimes made class sessions a little chaotic.

"My vision of standing in front of a quiet, attentive class while I explained all about art was just unrealistic. I found out it's up to the teacher to get the attention of the children—the burden is on you."

On the other hand, Miss Ross says she had underestimated the children. "I hadn't realized how quick and mature a 12-year-old can be. I have a tendency to want to do things myself. I had to train myself to keep my mouth shut, and let the kids do it themselves."

This is a policy that Chalmers himself followed in designing the course for his undergraduate students in art education. While he outlined the general goals he wanted them to achieve during the term, and was always available for consultation, he left the planning and actual teaching up to the student teachers.

Both Del Rosso and Miss Ross agree that it was rewarding for the whole class. They've learned the need to develop their own skills before attempting to teach, and they say that all the students enjoyed working with children.

"Even a girl who said she never wanted to teach in the primary grades," said Del Rosso, "got so turned on by the kids, she completely changed her mind. Most of us were sorry to see the lab end."

Chalmers points out that the course is actually one that was discontinued two years ago when space became difficult to find, and was resurrected when some of the departments of the School of Architecture and Allied Arts were able to spread out into the newly-opened addition to Lawrence Hall.

A lab group with new students and a new group of children will begin again during winter term. It seems to be a popular idea with Eugene school children.

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