

Teaching still enjoyable, challenging after 47 years for UNL instructor

By Christopher Burbach

After 47 years, she's still laughing. "Teaching — anything to do with children or pets — is fun. I think that teachers of children are privileged people, really, because it is fun to work with kids, and you better have that attitude, or you shouldn't be a teacher," she said.

Dorcas Cavett is an associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction at UNL who, after 47 years of teaching, will dismiss her last class at the end of this semester.

Cavett has written a book about her teaching experiences, tentatively titled *What Did You Learn in School Today, Henry?* The book is more than just an autobiography, however. Cavett has a mission for it, inspired by all the criticism recently directed at her profession.

"It's about the positive aspects of teaching," she said. "We have so much negativism, so much criticism, and I'm fed up to the eyebrows on it."

"Justifiable criticism is one thing, but everybody's an authority on education because they went to school. Far too many people have the impression that anybody can teach. I just say, 'Be my guest. I'd like to see you teach fourth grade for a year, and we'll see what you say,'" Cavett said.

Despite comments that teachers are underpaid, Cavett said, in many communities teachers are among the best paid people in the community. However, she said she thinks teachers' pay needs to be improved.

"All I have to do is look around and see how other people earn a living, and I'd take teaching any day," Cavett said.

What makes teaching so attractive to Cavett? "The main thing I like about teaching is the fact that no two days are the same, it's endless and varied," Cavett said. "I one time worked in a canning factory and I once worked in an onion field, and everything was neat and orderly and just the same and I nearly died of boredom."

"I love things where you never know what's going to happen next... and that's true with school. The humor that comes out constantly is fun. You can be sure of having a couple good laughs each day, which I think is great for anybody, I can think of a lot of jobs where that's not true at all."

In response to claims that schools act in more of a parental role than parents themselves, Cavett said teachers have to be in *loco parentis*, or in lieu of parents. They have to take over where the parents are not able to, she said. Yet, she said, teachers must remember that parents have the child three times as much each day as teachers do.

"When it comes to ethical values, and issues, it's

entirely up to the parents," Cavett said. We should be very careful about indoctrination of any kind."

Cavett said people should know teachers want children to learn the basic facts and be good students.

Cavett said the idea that anyone can teach is false. "It takes a person of character, intelligence and personality, about equal parts of each," Cavett said.

"I think this business of inspiring is a strong factor," Cavett said. "Teachers have to inspire little kids and they have to inspire college kids. Anybody can drill facts, but so can a good animal trainer."

Cavett said her favorite word in teaching is motivation.

"Get the kids excited and interested so they want to learn," Cavett said. "I've done that many times so I can talk now."

One example of motivation is a story Cavett tells all of her classes. While teaching sixth grade in Des Moines, Iowa, she bought a baby elephant from the state fair for the classroom pet.

"I have never in my life seen kids so turned on, I mean, they were really fired up," Cavett said. "We wrote stories, poems and songs and made up arithmetic problems and got more geography in that year. We read every story they could read about elephants; I thought I'd never get them run down."

What will Cavett do after her career ends?

"My husband's been retired and we want to have some fun together," she said. "I'm going to garden, play... go visit all my friends like I have never really had time to. And probably get mixed up in politics."

Cavett summed up her career, which began almost almost half century ago with a \$675 a year job in the '30s Depression.

"I've had 47 years of fun," she said.

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