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## **Creative Drama with Children**

*Summary: Creative Drama with Children provides a service learning opportunity for both theatre and non-theatre majors who attend the University of Minnesota, Morris.*

(December 16, 2008)-Creative Drama with Children provides a service-learning opportunity for both theatre and non-theatre majors who attend the University of Minnesota, Morris.

“I chose to take this elective course in the theatre discipline because in the distant future I plan to use my theatre degree to hold summer theatre workshops for kids,” said junior theatre major Tony Albright.

UMM Professor of Theatre Ray Schultz, who has been teaching this course since 2000, is pleased about the course’s accomplishments through the years. Creative Drama with Children has traditionally been a requirement for UMM students who plan to major in elementary education. Even non-elementary education majors who elect to take the course find it helpful and Schultz still hears from former students.

“I still get e-mails from students telling me how happy they are that they took this class. They tell me that they still use a lot of the improv games, as well as other dramatic exercises and techniques to aid learning, in their classes,” said Schultz.

Students who take the course develop children’s stories into dramas, which are then performed for grades K-6 in the area elementary schools surrounding the campus. In another course project, they develop poems that are performed for the students, as well as assist the children in developing their own poems. They play theatre games, such as improvisational theatre, with the kids. The students in Schultz’s class are also required to keep a journal throughout the class.

“One of my favorite [projects] was when we took children's books, adapted them into short plays and then performed them for groups of first graders,” said sophomore elementary education major Rachel Braegelmann. “It was so fun to get [children] involved because they were so unpredictable. They would shout out anything at any time, which we didn't mind. It was supposed to be an interactive experience for them,”

“I recommend anyone who plans to be a public speaker to take this class. It’s also a great way to learn how to work with others because everyone has to do group work. [This class is also beneficial to] children who come to watch and participate. They get a chance to find themselves, learn how to express themselves in different ways, and become more confident and assertive in public,” said Schultz.

The service-learning component of the course includes traveling to surrounding elementary schools to present creative dramatics in the classrooms. This offers students in those schools that cannot make it to UMM an opportunity to be both audiences and participants.

“The service-learning office has been very valuable, especially Argie [Manolis, who coordinates Service-Learning at

UMM]. If there is a course that is perfect for service learning, it's this one," Schultz said.

Schultz hopes his students complete the course with the feeling that drama can be fun, since the course is not about performing, but being loose, comfortable and creative.

"I would definitely recommend this class to others, whether you are an elementary education major or not," said Braegelmann. "It is a ton of fun and a break from your usual lecture class. There is movement and improv and we even got to play some old childhood games like red light green light."

The Service-Learning program supports faculty, students and community partners in creating community-based learning opportunities that meet community needs and student learning goals. About 25 service-learning courses are offered each year at UMM, involving more than 30 partnering agencies.

Photo: A past year's participants play theatre games

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