

# Student develops special topics course, teaches local elementary students theatre



Part of the curriculum uses sock puppets as an exercise. Photo courtesy of Theatre Club

By: Madison Wait

Sophomore Sarah Moxley, along with the help of Dr. Jim Thomas and fellow Gardner-Webb student Madison Wait, created, planned and implemented her own Special Topics course in theatre, in the spring semester of 2015.

The course, now in the academic catalogue as Theatre 400 (Theatre Club), partners with Graham Elementary, a local elementary school in Shelby, NC. The goal of the course is to provide Gardner-Webb students with real-life experience in theatre instruction, while providing the children at Graham Elementary with a creative outlet to express themselves.

"I came up with the idea for Theatre Club after I tutored at Graham Elementary for work study," Moxley said. "I noticed that [the kids] had trouble displaying their emotions, and would often seek out negative attention."

After she completed her work study, Moxley began brainstorming ways to give the kids a positive environment. She ended up speaking about the situation to her father, who suggested that she think about involving the kids in theatre.

"Theatre has so many different benefits," she said. "[Theatre] teaches you social skills, reading skills, communication and team work. It just seemed like a perfect fit."

What makes Theatre 400 unique from other theatre courses is that it's completely student-led. Although Thomas is the faculty supervisor and professor, the course is structured to function less like a class, and more like a club.

"I want the course to be a self-propelled project," said Thomas. "I meet with my students on a regular basis to help plan and advise them on how to interact with the kids." The students work together to draft an outline of their weekly curriculum, and then meet once a week as club at Graham Elementary.

The schedule however, is flexible depending on Gardner-Webb student availability. The program currently runs for eight weeks, but Thomas hopes to increase that number in the future. The long-term goal is for the course to become a regular part of the Gardner-Webb curriculum.

Thomas currently offers Theatre 400 as a one-hour credit, but stresses that volunteers are both welcomed and essential. "You don't even have to be a theatre major or minor," he said. "You just have to love theatre."

For Moxley, however, the main goal is simply to help the kids. "I really want the kids to thrive in an environment where they feel like they can embrace who they are," she said. Moxley worked with two other club members last semester who both agreed that the club had made a great impact on the kids at Graham Elementary.

"It's a terrific idea and a valuable experience for all of us," said Thomas.

Theatre 400 plans to launch the Spring, 2016 semester's club on Feb 8, and is looking for more volunteers to join the club and help support Graham Elementary's afterschool theatre program.

For more information on Theatre 400 or the Graham Elementary Theatre Club, you can contact Dr. Jim Thomas at [jwthomas@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:jwthomas@gardner-webb.edu) or Sarah Moxley at [smoxley@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:smoxley@gardner-webb.edu).

