

"What is silence?"

Dolci helps children foster cultural pride

Italian writer and social reformer Danilo Dolci spoke on his work in Sicily last Thursday in a special lecture in Curtis, sponsored by the departments of sociology, language studies and social sciences, and the faculty of education.

By DARA LEVINTER

"What is the question most deep in your heart that you ask yourself?"

To find the solution, 20 children spent a morning by the sea on the south-west coast of Sicily, before returning, questions in hand, to their teacher, Danilo Dolci.

In a subsequent group discussion conducted by the children themselves, one boy asked, "What is silence?", to which another replied, "It is midnight when a mafioso jumps on you."

After hearing several suggestions, the first boy decided that there are always sounds, but that we do not always hear them; the class ended by concluding that "silence does not exist; only one's capacity to listen or not listen".

The children, aged 10 to 14 years, are participants in a research programme designed to study the importance of verbal expression in

the learning process. The director and innovator of this programme is Danilo Dolci.

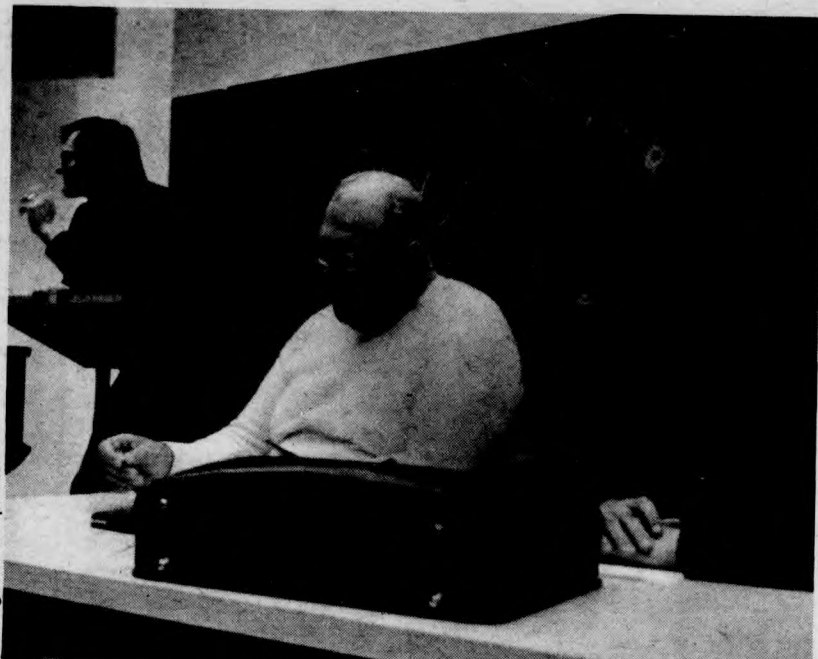
Dolci's background is that of a writer and social reformer. He originally became acquainted with Sicilian problems while working with peasants, studying as an architectural student.

In 1952, after the war, he returned determined to improve conditions in "the triangle of hunger", an area of starvation, open sewers, no education and rigid mafia control.

Dolci was able, through hunger strikes and "strikes in reverse", to accomplish non-violent reform; his actions resulted in two jail sentences. He also changed, through self and group analysis, the attitude of mafia-client relationships to one of mutual support.

He has become a controversial figure on the Sicilian scene, called by his supporters the "Gandhi of Sicily", and by his opponents "one of the Island's greatest evils".

Dolci says his primary motive in all his reforms has been the search for some means of change from the authoritarian tradition which has kept the Sicilians' attitude and conception of life basically static. This concern has led him to focus his



Danilo Dolci, anti-authoritarian teacher in Sicily, addresses an audience with translator Anthony Signorini (right) and professor A.H. Turrutin (standing).

attention upon updating their education system.

His basic idea of a school is as "reciprocal midwife", a concept which involves reaching a point in the group process where an environment can exist within which each

person is "midwife" to another.

"It is a structuring of schools which is still based on authoritarian models," he explains, "but which in the process seeks an alternative."

The model Dolci chose was a non-manipulative process of discovery — a patterned discussion promoting maximum participation followed by a period of personal interaction.

This sharing of diverse views, Dolci feels, is the ground for experiencing personal development and change, and its expression.

Four years ago, he opened an educational centre near the mountains, in an attempt to escape from the idea of "class" and all authoritarian terminology; the centre was geared toward children aged 5 to 14.

Seminars were held along the lines

of the above model, with guests invited to participate. One such seminar was held by a group of boys to discuss "what is a star?" The guests invited included a fisherman and an astronomer — the former having a more vital relationship with the subject, and the latter a more conceptual one.

"It is difficult to say from which guest the children learned most," concludes Dolci. The point, he stresses, is that apart from textual knowledge, advantage must be taken of an area's "local reservoir of information".

Dolci told a story of how, when choosing a site for the centre, he had asked a friend of his, an 80-year old man who was illiterate, to come and see it. The old man was disappointed, and when asked why, replied that the children would not be able to see the sea.

Dolci reiterated his goal to develop foremost in the minds of the Sicilian children "a sense of pride in the culture which surrounds them."

"And if that (the sea) is not a part of their culture, what is?"

C.S. travels to Winters

The Christian Science organization at York has moved its regular Wednesday meetings from the Ross Building into Winters College. From now on Org meetings will be held in the south half of the basement of Winters in Room 030-B, every Wednesday at 4 p.m. The room will also accommodate a free lending library for Christian Science books, as well as a quiet study area.

Drop-in year revives York spirit

By DOUG TINDAL

Monday, January 27, marked the first day of classes for 180 students in York's winter-summer session, popularly known as the drop-in year.

The programme, now in its third year, was inaugurated in the wake of the university's 1972 budget crisis, as an attempt to attract BIUs (basic income units — the government's monetary allotment per student) which might otherwise have escaped.

It was a success.

With classes starting toward the end of January, the drop-in year allows the university to pick up those students who want an extended break after grade 13, or whose semestered grade 13 or community college programmes are just finishing.

Students in the drop-in year take a more or less regular first year

programme, ending about the first week in August. Given that this period is without the major holidays of the regular academic year, the actual class time in the programme is almost identical to that of the regular programme.

The main distinguishing factors are social ones. The students are never really assimilated into the activities of the campus, since their courses are all different, and since they are alone at York for the second half of the year.

According to dean of arts Sid Eisen, this has led to the development of "a sort of esprit de corps" among the drop-in participants — "a sense of camaraderie that has been missing since the first days of York, back in 1965".

The students from last year's programme set up their own association in March, 1974.

They spent about two months securing a budget from the all but defunct college councils to which their various students belonged, and then ran a summer activities programme of beer lunches, barbecues, dances and a baseball game.

"It was all haphazard and spur-of-the-moment," said Harry Ross, one of the organizers, "but usually around 40 of the 150 students turned out for whatever was going on."

This year, all of the drop-in students are members of Founders College, which Ross hopes will ease the group's organization problems.

"More than one good thing has come from the budget crisis," commented Eisen. "The drop-in year is certainly one of them."

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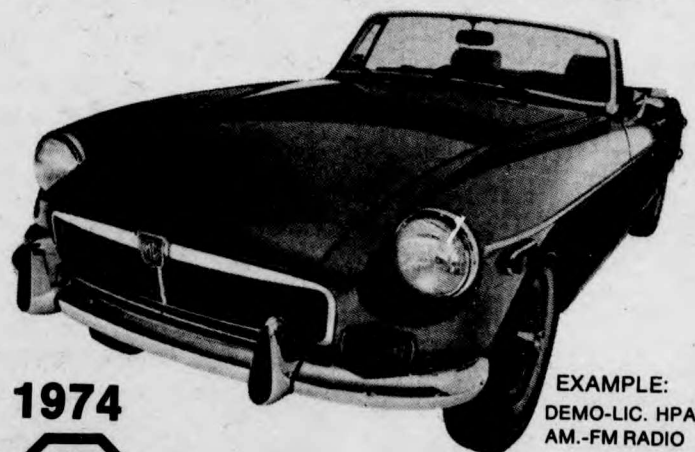
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