Gilbert desires informality

By BETH SPRINGGATE
Staff Writer

If high quality teaching were measured by the desire to teach, Edwyna Gilbert, associate professor of curriculum and instruction, would break the scale. She says she wants to teach "forever."

"I don't think just anyone can be a teacher," she said recently. "You have to want to do it.

"I think teaching is caring. It's not enough to know statistics and facts. I think you have to be able to say, 'Hey, that means something to me.'"

If a teacher tells his students to read a book and learn the facts, he won't be as successful as a teacher who adds to the reading by relating the facts to life, she said.

"I TRY TO make my classes informal," she said. "We try to have a lot of discussion. I try to relate things that we discuss in class to things in life."

Life outside the University of Kansas isn't the limit to experience, Gilbert said. The world within the University can be just as challenging, she said.

"I hope that my students, after they've been in that real world, will take the opportunity to get into this world," she said.

She said she wanted her students to try University teaching to find out whether they liked it.

She said, "I don't like German chocolate cake, but if I came to your house, I'd make an attempt to eat it."

GILBERT SAID teaching at KU could be frustrating at times.

She said that last year, when she was nominated for the HOPE award but didn't win it, she felt as if she had gone unrewarded for her efforts.

"There just aren't enough awards to recognize all of the people here," she said. "I think teaching should be more important than it is. I think more attention should be paid to teachers."

She added that most teachers at KU were good, conscientious teachers who were interested in the school and the community.

Those teachers who take advantage of research grants and leave Lawrence to study aren't doing justice to the school, Gilbert said. It is those teachers who remain in Lawrence and work within the school who deserve praise, she said.

A teacher must teach the same course semester after semester, Gilbert said. She said it was her responsibility to keep her classes refreshing for her students.

"I THINK ALL teachers can be more effective," she said. "Even if you teach the same course semester after semester, you never teach it the same way."" If you're a teacher, it's a 24-hour thing," she said. "It's always on your mind. I'm always asking myself, 'How can I teach him better?' I ask it every semester and every day."

The ideas she presents to her classes are the ideas she has incorporated into her teaching from 15 years of experience at KU.

Gilbert was born in Maryville, Mo. but has lived in Lawrence since 1962 when she came here with a friend, Oscar Howe, a former HOPE award winner.

AT KU SHE earned her doctorate and met her husband, William Gilbert, professor of history, who she said had had a great influence on her teaching philosophy.

Each semester she pursues that philosophy, especially in a class she teaches called, "Teaching Language Arts in the Secondary Schools," a methods class for student teachers.

When she meets a new group of students in that class at the start of each semester, she said, "It's like going to a party for the first time. You're kind of wondering what they are and what they want."

With each new group she faces two challenges. She said she wanted to teach her students how to be successful teachers and to introduce them to existing problems so they could be aware of them and correct them if the opportunity arose.

SHE SAID, "You're preparing them for something immediate and for something long-range. But I don't think you ever achieve all of your goals, and that's what keeps you going."

She said she attempted to meet the challenge of teaching her students by criticizing their work and understanding their problems.

Gilbert may have found a solution to the students' problem of finding enough time to devote to each class.

She said, "The ideal in teaching would be to sit in your office from 8 to 4 and sit around and talk with the students."

"Better yet, the ideal in teaching would be if you could be like Socrates and go around and talk to students."