

A Life of Learning and Teaching
By Lucille Cudmore

My two years as a “coacher” at Takini School were my most significant work experience. Even though we were using a philosophy of teaching in which teachers were facilitators of learning, locally we were called “coachers.” We practiced inclusion and outcome based education. Superintendent Dr. Ken Engelhardt encouraged us to try new strategies. He said, “What we have done for the last one hundred years did not work with the Native American child. We need to change what we are doing to facilitate the learning success for all students in this school.” Takini opened in 1989 with the motto of Woonspe Okolakiciye: A Learning Place for the Success of All. The Lakota word Takini means survivor. In the community, many families were descendents of the Big Foot Tribe who survived the Battle of Wounded Knee.

With a visionary leader at the helm, the climate at the school was favorable to innovative and creative approaches to educational reform. Teachers were coachers who did not use the traditional methodology or curriculum, but instead took risks, were innovative, and developed curriculum appropriate to the needs of the students in their classrooms. They set high performance expectations and encouraged, motivated, and guided students to achieve those expectations. Coachers would share with students the responsibilities for learning.

We did not “cover the curriculum” meaning teach the textbook page by page, but we selected what was considered vital to the discipline and taught the material in depth. To ensure a fully developed course of study across the grades, we worked on curriculum and developed a K-12 plan. In this innovative approach, we taught using outcome based education with a thematic approach that included hands-on activities and performance based assessment. Students were placed within multi-age groups called Learning Circles. Native American coachers and support staff were a vital component to ensure cultural appropriateness for the students and success for the school.

My years at Takini School brought together my lifetime experiences of learning and teaching. My education began in my home with my parents as my first teachers. Mother and her brother Dr. J. T. Tripp were raised by my grandmother alone, as my grandfather died two months before mother was born. Dad’s parents both immigrated from Norway and raised five children, three who were farmers and two who received their PHDs.

My elementary years were spent in a one room rural school, the Tripp School. I spent my four high school years at White Lake Independent and in 1947 graduated salutatorian. My two older sisters had jobs teaching. I was going to become a teacher also. Springfield, South Dakota had a teacher’s college with two summer sessions which would allow me to teach in a rural school with a permit. Completing those summer sessions, I signed a contract to teach at a rural school, just three miles from my parent’s home. Fifteen students and seven grades were assigned to my well qualified position.

Mrs. Katherine Griffin had been my teacher in a rural school, where I was the only student in my grade. She was an excellent teacher who had high expectations for each student in our school. Discipline was not an issue in her classroom as the parents supported her and because we all were taught at home to

be respectful, stay on task and finish our work at school. I modeled my teaching style to mirror hers. I held classes for each grade and we had discussions about required readings. As the teacher, I was expected to supervise students at all times. The students and I would play softball, go for hikes, play games such as Red Rover, or play tag (running water still water). All students would play and the older students would help the younger children.

Together we shared great times for learning. We had to prepare for declamatory and spelling contests. Christmas programs were the BIG event for the year. Each student was expected to learn and recite a lengthy recitation. A thirty-minute play was to be mastered and presented to the audience which included every relative and neighbor within miles. Mothers served sandwiches, cookies and a drink following the presentation. The grand finale was when Santa entered with a bag of candies that were handed out to the children first and then to all of those present.

Another big event was the day the county superintendent came to visit. Her name was Dorothy Nelson and she was a very nice lady. She spent the day observing and making notes about my teaching. I received a very positive evaluation. The next summer I attended summer school again and taught the following school term at the Tripp School that I had attended which was a quarter mile from my parent's home. I walked to and from school daily and was very happy working with these students.

In October, I became engaged to Eddie Cudmore and we were married on December 21st. We drove to Rapid City, SD for our honeymoon. Eddie's brother, Gaylord, lived at New Underwood on a ranch so we visited with them before returning to White Lake. I finished teaching that school year and was asked to teach at the Tripp School for another year. But I was pregnant and women during that time did not leave their children with a baby sitter. I did not resume my teaching career until 1958 when the superintendent called and asked me to teach for a semester the Kindergarten at Philip where Eddie operated a gas station.

Then the school board at Wolden School came and asked me if I would teach at their K-7 rural school. The four Wolden children were the only students at the school. I took my three school age children with me which worked out quite well. The Wolden children were good students but the oldest boy was defiant and did not have any desire to get his work done. One day he decided he was not going to do a G__D__ thing for me. I told him to go home and bring his parents back with him. He left and returned within the hour with his parents. I told him to tell his parents what caused the issue. They said he would do the same behavior at home. I said, "If you allow this at home, it is up to you. This will not be acceptable at school." He apologized and we did not have another event related to this behavior.

The next four years I was asked to teach at the Clements School and two years at the OLD TRAIL School. The day President Kennedy was assassinated, one of the parents came to the school and told us the news. School was dismissed for the remainder of the day.

While my fifth child was a baby, I had a pre-school in my home for two years. That was when the school board of Philip Independent School District came and asked me to teach fourth grade in Philip. Our youngest daughter was born during that time but I continued to teach.

All the while I was teaching in Philip, I was taking night classes at Ellsworth Air Force Base and I graduated with a degree in Elementary Education in 1970. Several new education issues were being implemented: individualized instruction and new math. Several teachers were sent to view the Cherry Creek Schools near Denver, Colorado. I was one of those teachers. I came away from that experience with the determination to use individualized instruction to the best of my ability with forty students in my classroom. I believe that all students can learn; BUT, they will not all learn at the same rate, with curriculum presented in the same way. For the remainder of my career, it was my goal to provide for the individual differences among students. By looking at the student as an individual with unique strengths and weaknesses, discipline behaviors basically were lessened dramatically and learning escalated.

We moved to Bowdle in 1971 where I was hired to teach fifth grade. Bowdle is an ethnic community where my family learned to enjoy the German foods. DELICIOUS!! This gave me the opportunity to individualize my math with the 47 students I had. This was a unique experience for me as a playground supervisor I encountered bullying at an unbelievable level. (Names are not real.) Tessa was a leader of the group on the playground. As I observed when Nancy and Polly were on a piece of playground equipment, the rest of the students would follow Tessa to a new area. When Nancy and Polly went to a new area, Tessa would move away and the rest of the students would follow her.

I spoke to the Superintendent about my observations and he told me “don’t make waves.” I believed I needed to do something about the situation. The next day, I sent Tessa to the counselor’s office. I had briefed him about my observations. Tessa gave me a look that could kill as she left the room. The next morning, one mad mama came storming into my classroom. I got up quietly and closed the door.

Tessa’s Mom said, “Who authorized you to send my daughter to the counselor?” I said, “Mrs----- let me tell you what I have observed. If you think that this is happening at fifth grade level, what will it be like when she is a teenager?” When she left the room, she thanked me and the next morning she brought me sweet corn, tomatoes, and cucumbers. At Christmas time, Tessa came to me and said, “Mrs. Cudmore, this has been the best year I have ever had.”

I was told, by a long time teacher at the school, that Tessa had been in control of the students from the time she entered kindergarten. She had charged five cents for every student who wanted to be part of her group and no one had ever addressed this behavior as it would be considered “making waves.” My belief has been if I think I’m right, I’m willing to fight for that belief.

My husband’s job took us to our next move to New Underwood. I found a job teaching k-4 at Red Top School which was five miles north of New Underwood, in Meade County. I started teaching in the Meade 46-1 District in 1972 and taught there until 1991. Former Governor Walter Dale Miller’s youngest daughter was one of my first grade students. There was jealousy on the part of some of the parents believing that I would treat his daughter different because of her family. They had a swimming pool and a very nice ranch home. Her mother was extremely supportive and did not expect any special treatment. My seven years at Red Top School were very enjoyable, successful and a great opportunity.

This experience allowed me to provide for individual differences as I worked with my K-4 students. I had two fourth grade students who were very competitive and hard working. They completed all of the

fourth grade math curriculum in December and we just moved to fifth grade. They finished a semester of fifth grade Math by May and were excited to be fifth grade full time when school resumed in September.

I completed my Masters' Degree in 1981 but continued taking classes because the new ideas and methods intrigued me. I taught several classes at the undergraduate level at BHSU, The Kindergarten and Creative Activities for Elementary Teachers. At the graduate level, I taught Systematic Training for Effective Teaching for BHSU and SDSU.

From there I was hired as a Curriculum Consultant with the NSF/SSI in Pierre. My role was to mentor and monitor ten NSF project sites which were located across the West River area. I held train-the-trainers sessions at most of those sites. The graduate and undergraduate classes included Performance Based Assessment and Calculators in the Classroom. During the summer of 1994, I was selected to work with the Education Development Center in Newton, MA for five weeks. There we attended workshops designed to train teachers in Mathematics. I had the experience and the ability to work with educators as well as students; and I had the desire to make a difference in education and professional educators.

Lucille Cudmore taught for fifty years, teaching everything from pre-school in her home to all the elementary grades, alternative high schools and university classes. She has a master's degree plus thirty hours. She had all of the chemical dependency classes needed to be a certified Chemical Dependency Counselor. She was employed by Black Hills Special Services Coop as a Teacher of Chemically Dependent Students at Black Hills Career Academy. She worked with the National Science Foundation as a curriculum consultant working with ten school districts to change the way math, science and technology were being taught. Her dedication to teaching and learning provided her a lifetime of enjoyment within the educational community.