

KINDERGARTEN MEMORIES
BY ARDEE HINZMAN

My teaching career began when I was in first grade. I loved my first grade teacher. I lined my dolls up in a row on my bed and “taught school.” My mother said my voice and manner changed each year with the teacher I had. After visiting a country school, I thought I would like to teach in a country school.

I taught Sunday School and Bible School. My daughters were in school when I decided to pursue my dream of becoming a teacher. I attended San Jose City College. When we moved back to Rapid City, I worked as a teacher’s aide and student taught at Bergquist elementary, K through 2nd grades. I took classes at Ellsworth Air force Base, and went summers as well as one semester at Black Hills State University on campus. I received my degree in December 1975.

There was a kindergarten opening at General Beadle School. I was surprised but happy to get hired. Beginning in the middle of the year was a challenge. I had 30 students in each session. There were many student transfers in and out. I wanted firm but loving and positive discipline. I appreciated that the room was already set up. However, one student informed me that I “sure got mixed up a lot!” By the end of the year, I was in tears when I said goodbye to my first class as the kids left for summer vacation.

I didn’t realize I would have sixty little kindergartners the next fall. Maximum class size was reduced to 27 and when I retired, class size was 25. Teaching early childhood was for me! My attention span was like the kindergartners, 20 minutes sitting and 20 minutes activity, then we moved on. We were actively engaged and busy. I dropped the rest time. Milk break was discontinued after a few years. The milk helpers and milk wagon were out of a job.

There was a lot to accomplish in 2 ½ hours: calendar activity, language arts, math, handwriting, social studies, science, health, art, music, show and tell, language, safety, and social time. Later, I had a speech teacher come in for a language activity, library one a week, PE three times a week and computer lab. There was so much to do and so little time! Kindergarten should be a full day.

I taught in units and integrated subjects. I had color units, shape units, numbers 1-10 units, and letter of the week. Worksheets and workbooks didn’t work so well with so many students. Hands-on and manipulatives were more developmentally age appropriate. Implementing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities in combination were most effective. “Handwriting without Tears” was the best example of this.

The challenge of setting up the manipulative activities for so many children was hard. I started centers. They provided the opportunity for small groups to do one activity a day until the rotation of centers was completed. Tutors, aides and parent volunteers could play a learning game or do an activity with a small group. I could do an instruction lesson in handwriting or reading, and other groups could work independently. In addition to centers, we also had whole group instruction in the curriculum areas.

I also had “play choice” which provided opportunities for social interaction, children’s interest and learning through play. Choices were block building (pre-math), kitchen, train, cars, puppets, clay, art table, puzzles, books and tapes, painting, tools, and computers. This was a time for me to assess students’ progress.

I had a substitute teacher once who did not get to Play Choice. One student in leaving commented that there wasn’t Play Choice. The teacher said they ran out of time, to which the student replied that he would “just go ahead and stay then.”

I have so many good memories and here are a few of my favorites:

Reading readiness – Animal Island and Letter Island. Big books and tapes where animals with personalities and voices taught letters.

Small student groups at the beginning of the year.

Reading our plan for the day on arrival, and checking off what was accomplished at dismissal.

Delicious Math. Adding and subtracting by eating goldfish crackers, graphing M&Ms.

Drawing and writing letters and numbers in chocolate pudding, or shaving cream (which helped clean tables. Writing magic “c” letters in cornmeal.

Reading to the children and listening to them read their little books.

Computer – Dr. Seuss ABC.

Making gingerbread boy or girl cookies. The children cut and decorated them.

Music – ABC Rock, Hokey Pokey, rhythm band, Christmas Music Sing (Everyone loves the kindergartners!)

Barry B. Good Puppet – he chose the best helper for the day. The best helper wore bear ears, held the flag, and led calendar activity.

Checking the children to see if they passed inspection for being zipped up and ready to go outside in the cold. The quietest line got to go first.

Getting together with the other kindergarten class on Freaky Friday. I also loved Bear Day and Cowboy Day.

Drawings with words written by or dictation supplied by the children about the picture. They were put into a book. I told the children they were my favorite thing that the children did.

Favorite line: When one child got sick, another child said, “He must have gotten bad Cheerios.” Picture that!

Stuffed animals taken home and returned the next day with a story.

Planting giant sunflowers and getting a picture of the child next to them when they grew tall.

Giving Red Badges of Courage for bravery and reward tickets like “You are the Apple of my Eye.”

Holiday fun – learning activities and hats planned to go with that holiday.

Cutting out silhouettes of the kids’ profiles.

Smiles and hugs. Happy kids. Kindergarten was for the kids in my classes. It was hard work but a labor of love. I treasure the engraving on the bell given to me from Meadowbrook School. It honors me for 29 years of teaching and loving children.