

REMINISCENT TEACHER ESSAY, 2013
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COMPARISONS

As we age, we can't avoid making comparisons....what was then and what is now. During my lifetime, I have viewed countless changes. Perhaps the biggest one has been in technology, but I want to address the changes in teaching that I have seen and/or experienced.

For starters, I began my teaching career at the age of eighteen, which is unheard of now. At this time, some states require a beginning teacher to have a Master's Degree, but I was certified to teach a rural school after only one year of college education courses. I had seventeen students in all eight grades. It was the best weight-loss program I was ever on....25 pounds in three months!! Twenty years after high school graduation and three daughters later, I received my BS in Education degree. That was not all that uncommon for those of us who began college in the 1950s.

In a rural school, I was the teacher, janitor, nurse, secretary, music and drama teacher (annual school program required), counselor, physical education instructor and art teacher. By the time I retired in 1995, I was teaching only one eighth grade English class....the same lesson six times a day. What a switch from teaching eight reading classes between 9:00-10:15 and eight arithmetic classes between 10:30-11:45 each day!! Thank heavens my older students assisted the younger children. In a sense, I did have teacher's aides that first year, but I can remember having 40 fifth graders in my class in Rapid City and NO aide. Because I always taught upper grades (5, 6, 8), I never had the "luxury" of a full-time aide, but I was extremely grateful to be able to share an aide during some of the years I taught sixth grade. An extra set of hands to create bulletin boards and check those 130+ spelling papers was truly appreciated. An aide meant that I could even take a potty break occasionally....another "luxury"!

Some teachers may not think an administrator on site is a luxury, but when one begins teaching with the supervisor about twenty miles away in the county seat, she realizes it's nice to have support nearby when certain challenges arise. A super luxury for me was when a school counselor was hired in about 1978, when my students really needed that kind of professional help.

Another big change that I experienced was in record keeping. In the rural school, I had to keep the attendance registers and grade books in perfect order. Every six weeks the attendance reports were sent to the county superintendents, and they needed to be accurate. In due time, the school secretaries were in charge of all the records. I did not experience computerization of the attendance and grades except when I did some substitute teaching after I retired. I also never had the opportunity to have my students' grades averaged by the click of a mouse. Being able to use a calculator to average grades was wonderful progress, I thought.

Computer instruction was added to our sixth grade curriculum in the early 1980s, when we actually taught our students how to create simple programs and keyboarding. It's mindboggling to see each student with his/her own laptop nowadays.

Those with iPhones now would never believe that we didn't even have a crank telephone in the rural school when I began my career. If a child became ill, I had no way to notify the parents. One day the furnace overheated so much that the varnish on the woodwork was melting. I was sure it was going to explode and the school would burn down. I sent a student running to the nearest farm ½ mile away to call the fire department. I could not leave the children there, nor could I get seventeen of them into my car to take them to safety. That scary situation is still clear in my mind almost 60 years later!

Another HUGE change I experienced was in preparing worksheets for my classes. When I began teaching, I would use carbon paper and make enough copies by printing or typing worksheets. The most I ever needed of one kind were four, but I had to press really hard to make readable carbon copies. I also had a hectograph, which was a pan of gel where copies could be made, as long as one waited long enough for the printed material to sink into the gel! (I won't even TRY to explain how it worked.) Eventually, we had the infamous purple ditto copy machine, mimeograph, and eventually a copy machine that would collate and staple. Again, I retired before computers were used for electronically submitting homework and projects.

Other big changes I observed over those forty years are as follows:

SALARY: My first pay checks were less than \$200 a month. Women teachers were paid less than men for doing the same job. When I retired in 1995, my salary for the year was in the \$21,000 range.....for 28 years of teaching experience and the education equivalent of a Master's Degree.

DRESS: We were required to wear dresses or skirts to college classes and to all meals. We wore dresses for teaching until about 1960, when women teachers were allowed to wear pant suits **ONLY** if we had playground duty in cold weather. By the time I retired, many of my co-workers wore jeans in the classroom, something I never did. I wore slacks, but never jeans; I guess those college and early days of teachers dressing “properly” were just too engrained in me!

PREGNANCY RULES: In 1962, I had to resign my teaching position when I was 4 ½ months pregnant because “children should not see a pregnant woman in the classroom.” By the time I retired, one of my students wrote about her one-year- old son in her eighth grade journal, and one of my eighth graders could not fit in the classroom desk because she was so pregnant.

Those who began their teaching careers in a rural school can relate to my story. Those who are much younger will find it hard to believe. It’s the way it was, and we accepted the policies. We were happy to have a job, and we were dedicated to the teaching profession. We want to believe that we had a positive influence on the lives of those young people we taught. In my case, it was over 2000 students. Our rewards are the kind words we hear from those former students and their parents or when we hear of their successes in life. (The monthly retirement check from SDRS is pretty nice too!!!)