

## Chapter 2-7

### Fifty-One Years in Education

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When I was young, school was important to me. I started to write poetry when it was taught to me, beginning around the sixth grade at the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Campus school. This affinity for poetry continued until I was a senior in high school. I wanted to be a poet as my chosen profession. My wise father, in 1969, tactfully told me that poetry did not pay well but that since I was an avid reader, perhaps I could major in English and secure an education degree. He also encouraged me to pick up a music minor since I loved to sing and played the French horn for eight years. He implied that I could write poetry on the side as an English major, perhaps setting the lyrics to music.

Thus, I began my university studies where I had some excellent MTSU professors in the early '70s: Dr. N and Dr. W (Education), Dr. B. (English), and Drs. N and M (Music). All of them contributed to my maturity as I grew into young adulthood. Graduating a semester early back then was relatively easy, but finding a teaching job was much more difficult.

The following August, a middle school hired me to teach choral music. I was able to do that for two years on an interim basis. Meanwhile, I was taking classes in the summer to secure an elementary education certification, as teaching English to high school students proved challenging. Had there been more field experience requirements as there are these days, I would have learned earlier that teaching high school was not what I wanted to do.

Not deterred from teaching but struggling to figure out what I wanted, I was hired to teach the sixth grade in rural Wilson County at Watertown Elementary School. When the principal took me to my classroom, he told me I would have 39 sixth graders that year! He said that if more came and there were 40, he could hire another teacher. (That never happened, as I ended the school year with 38 students.)

After that very challenging year, I was able to find my footing with the wide variety of students within my school. I taught sixth grade for 11 years while securing a master's degree in Curriculum and Development at MTSU. We were a Title One School, and my students needed caring teachers' support. The Career Ladder program was underway, and I applied and achieved the highest level, a Career Ladder 3 teacher. This program enabled me to develop a program during the summer focusing on music, art, and physical education. With the Career Ladder money under our Tennessee governor in the '80s, my arts enrichment program was wildly popular and filled up quickly for many years. I understood the need for a complete arts program in Wilson County.

During that time, we needed a physical education program to be developed and utilized at Watertown Elementary. I approached my principal about starting that program. He only agreed to do so if I would teach music two days a week and physical education three days a week. (That music minor came in handy once again). After a couple of years, I took a year off from teaching, borrowed money from my wise dad (I paid him back) to return to MTSU, and majored in physical education. I had recently completed my Ed.S. degree in Administration and Supervision. Once again, MTSU allowed me to pick up more classes to add a major to my teaching resume: physical education, K-12.

Luckily, upon my return, my school hired an outstanding music teacher, and she and I worked well together for many more years as a team in music and physical education. (I would not advise combining choral music and physical education for teacher candidates today as the two areas are physically exhausting if done well).

One of the highlights of teaching physical education for me was applying for and receiving a grant that enabled our school to acquire rollerblade skates as part of our curriculum. That was a great challenge for me, but the students enjoyed it. I included it in our summer arts program, too, and the students enjoyed skating down the hall, through the cafeteria, outside in the parking lot, and the gym!

I also incorporated the Presidential Physical Fitness Test into our curriculum. One of its components includes running a mile. With help from the students' parents and the mayor of our small town, Watertown, we closed Main Street twice a year to have a one-mile fun run. It included the local ambulance at one end, the police at the other, and numerous parents lined up along the course route. Each class from third to sixth grade would come out to run after having qualified ahead of time during PE (Physical Education) class time to do a 15-minute mile. Because I ran races in Nashville, Murfreesboro, and Middle Tennessee, many runners gave me their winning trophies to use for my students in our race. I had them refurbished, of course, to fit our students. This event helped to start a running trend with a few of my former students, who are running today as adults.

I had many fantastic education professors from MTSU. Without their guidance, I would have possibly stayed with just a bachelor's degree and taught elementary education. But they inspired me to keep studying and advancing my education.

In 1998, I was hired as an interim administrator to finish the spring semester when the serving principal became ill, and later that year, I was asked to be an assistant principal. After one year as an assistant, the principal retired, and I became the school principal. I wish I had more training as an administrator at that time, but I spent my last few years as the principal, learning on the job. I knew it was time to retire when the children of my first sixth graders grew up and started having their children! Retirement came in December 2004.

After one semester of retirement, I realized I was not ready to quit working with young people. I then became an elementary program supervisor of student teachers at MTSU in the fall of 2005. This program has developed tremendously since 2013. I have watched teacher candidates pass TPA (the state-mandated licensure assessment) and learn the TEAM rubrics for evaluation purposes, modeled after the state of Tennessee's requirements for educators. Several former student teachers are currently mentor teachers and are working with today's teacher candidates.

Even after 51 years, it is still a thrill to have a former student from elementary school or a former student from the university come up to me and tell me that I have made a difference in their lives. I know that they have made a difference to mine. (They always want me to guess who they are; for the most part, I can produce their name). I could not have done it without the outstanding leadership of the excellent professors at MTSU who were part of my early journey into teacher education.