

CHANGES

A look back from the eyes of a retired educator

By Terri Kaufman

In the summer of 1988 my father helped my son Travis and I pack up and move from Montana to Arizona so that I could teach in Salome. I was divorced and had just finished working my way through school. Trav had finished his first year of high school. He moved from a graduating class of hundreds to one of less than 20. Because I was his English teacher from his sophomore year through graduation, he and his friends called me "Mom" in the classroom; I had a unique perspective on teaching from a parent's and a teacher's point of view. Teaching changed over the years, as did testing and, to some extent, students.



The first year I taught, I reported to the high school office on my first day and was given a set of keys and told where my room was. That was that. When I unlocked the door and entered the classroom, English grades 9-12 were mine to plan for and organize. I enjoyed the freedom and trust placed in me; however, I remember feeling glad that I was older when I started because, even though I had the butterflies in my stomach of starting a totally new adventure, I had life experience packed along with me. Ownership of the school year was mine to develop or not. This set up has its good and bad points. Each staff member would be very dedicated, but a unified vision probably would not develop. Each classroom was its own little world.

A teacher new to a school now may be working for days before they are given the keys to their classrooms. The first days of school now are filled with teachers' meetings. Don't get me wrong, these meetings are important, especially in larger schools because they give teachers a connection with other colleagues, some of whom a teacher may not see again for a month or more when another whole staff meeting is scheduled. The meetings help to get a large group of people focused on the same goals.

Testing was another world. In the beginning, the tests my students took were generally the ones I wrote for material I determined to cover. So as a teacher, I saw standardized tests as a mixed blessing. The deviation of what I tested on and what another teacher in another classroom in another part of the state, or even in the same school, tested on could be huge. This set up was good for teacher morale, but

not very good for students who would be keeping up with or competing with students in those other classrooms next year or in a few years when they entered the job market or when they went on with their educations beyond high school. Once

a parent asked me at a parent/teacher conference night whether or not students at the school were doing AIMS (Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards) testing preparation. This question puzzled me and made me wonder. Aren't the tests designed to measure basic skills, so ideally, special preparation should not be necessary? The test should be material that the students can handle because the subjects tested should be the ones that the students are routinely working on in their classes. It's impossible to "cram" for these tests.

Teaching and testing have changed over the years, but have students? I don't think students have changed as much as their choices have changed. As a teacher, I often thought that I was glad I went to high school at the time I did. We were expected to act a certain way, and for the most part, we acted that way. Usually there was one telephone and one television in the house, and you shared them with the other people in your family. According to wiki.com.answers, there are now 120,000,000 phones in the United States. Students have much more control over their lives now. Many students have cell phones and spend a lot of time texting—I'm still trying to get this down, lol!). They can make more of their own decisions from deciding what they are going to eat for dinner to structuring their own time to include television, Internet, and games. Somewhere in there, they need to fit in homework. Some students are better at planning and prioritizing than others.

For some students the pressures of testing and getting into college are huge. When I started teaching, if students graduated from a Montana high school, they could automatically enroll in a Montana college or university. In addition, students have much more exposure to serious decisions about relationships with another person at younger ages than in the past. The pressures of drinking and drug use are much more prevalent now. It is not easy to be a student at this time; there is a lot of pressure on a student's shoulders. One of the many positive things about the Lake Havasu community is that people in leadership have recognized these pressures and have taken measures to help young people handle them. The schools have helped with after school programs, clubs, and extracurricular activities. In addition, there is a wider vision here with the service clubs and business people who put together spring break activities and after graduation and after prom parties for young people.

Even with the changes, I valued my time as a teacher. There was something very vital about being with a group of people who were on the verge of starting out on the journey of their lives. They may not have seen it as any big deal, but as a teacher I saw in every one of the students their potential. Whether or not they were excited about the possibilities, I felt great hope in the future I saw in the students. Even with the students who may have had a struggle ahead of them, I saw the possibility of them putting their lives together in a way that was meaningful for them. Teaching produced in me a great faith in people and the future.

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