

All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten

I attended a one teacher school outside Wellington NSW which was actually situated on a corner of my parents' farm. All the children attending were farmers' kids and we were related to most of them. When I started we rode our bikes the half mile of dirt road to school while others rode horses. It was a truly blessed start to education. Sadly, my Year 6 was the last to go through Curra Creek Public School. During the school holidays, two trucks arrived with a team of workmen who sawed our single room in half, loaded it on the trucks and it disappeared to be relocated to another rural area.

"Most of what I really needed to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be, I learned in Kindergarten.

While there has been an enormous amount of teaching aimed at me since then, and a certain degree of learning undertaken by me in that time, it was back in kindergarten that I learned some basic facts about life and learning which have carried me through in a lifelong love affair with education.

These are the things I learned:

Put your hand up if you want to speak, and don't speak if someone else is speaking. Men teachers are called Sir. In faraway schools in big towns there are supposedly women teachers. (I had no idea what they would be called). Teachers know a lot but not everything. Especially farm stuff. (Sir was from the city).

Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say sorry when you hurt others, wash your hands before you eat. Singing lessons come from the radio on a program called Let's Join In (the big kids had Singing Together). When you're big you can go and get wood for the school stove.

Have a rest every afternoon. When you get up, you can play with the toys on the mat.

When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, (Get off your bike and get off the road if a car comes!) hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the cotton wool on the saucer? The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody knows how or why, but we are all like that. If everything gets too tough, find your big sister.

Pet lambs, rabbits and mice and even the little seed in the cotton wool - they all die. So do we. Ants can survive for an extraordinarily long time under water when you sit them on a stone and then drop the stone in a basin of water.

And then remember the book about David Sue and Wendy, possibly one of the most boring books ever written but I can still recite it word for word. It did, however, contain one of the most important words of all: SEE. (See David run; see Sue run; See Wendy run)

Everything you need to know is in the encyclopaedias. (Including full colour illustrations of all Australia's deadliest snakes) When you're big you will be allowed to look at them by yourself.

I could go on – those times are vividly embedded in my brain, because the early years are the most crucial in terms of how we not only look at the world, but how we look at and think about learning.

Think of what a better world it would be if we, the whole world – still lived by those simple rules. If we listened when other people spoke; if we played fair in everything we did; or if we had a basic policy in our nations and other nations to always put things back where we found them and cleaned up our messes.

And it is still true; no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together. And we still need to SEE; look around us and actually see what is there and marvel at it and appreciate it.

And you know what? When things get really tough, I still look for my big sister!

You are all here tonight because you have a special little person who is probably going to come to Big School next year. This is one of the biggest changes that your child will undertake in their life, and almost certainly the biggest so far. It is also going to be a challenging time for you, as your baby is becoming a fully fledged schoolkid, with new friends and a new very powerful mentor. Currently, you are probably the most significant adults in your child's life, but next year, you will almost certainly be challenged with "But Miss said...."
Be prepared.

What I would like to talk about with you tonight is how to make the transition to school as easy as possible for you and your child. To provide you with a bit of information about what we expect from our new kinders, and about what you can expect from us in terms of how we operate and what we look for in our prospective students.

I know you will have lots of questions, so I am hoping that tonight you will get answers for most of those questions. There are representatives from many schools here tonight, all of whom will be happy to talk to you about the specific programs and processes that operate in their school. I am also happy to try to answer any questions you may have, but my answers will be coloured by how we do things at Wollongong Public and it is a long time since I actually taught Kindergarten!(20 years in fact!)

With this in mind, I have 2 short power point presentations about coming to school that hopefully will address some of your questions, and will also give you an idea of what transition programs are all about.

The first one is about readiness.

Power point – Student Readiness

The second one is a little more specific, and is about our transition to school program Wollongong Public School. Every school will be different in how they introduce your child to school, but all of them will be aiming to introduce school to them so that they feel confident and comfortable when they arrive at Big School.

Power point – WPS Kinder Transition

I will leave you with a Chinese proverb:

Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere.