

# Reflections on Teaching

“My husband, Bev Davies ‘76, and I had the great good fortune to attend the College in the early ‘70s. (Already a college graduate) I attended the College to become certified to teach kindergarten through middle school. . . I needed help with learning how to teach kindergarten. Fortunately, I had the experience of taking Don Sawyers’ absolutely inspiring class on methods and kindergarteners. In addition to being an informative class, his love of children and joy for his profession, not to mention the fun he created, made a lifelong impact on me. I’ve always remembered that he dyed his hair green for St. Patrick’s Day for his students. What a way to make an impression and have children connect information with fun!

We later left Wise when I became pregnant with our first daughter and returned to Richmond, my hometown. I’ve stayed in education, going on to teach at St. Catherine’s for 15 years and then leaving there to begin a girls’ middle school in 1998. The school is Orchard House, named after the family home of Louisa May Alcott and Little Women. It is a research-based middle school, grades 5-8, that is known for its leadership program, academics, arts program and athletic teams.

I am ever grateful to the teachers who taught me at the College, the ones I worked with in Pound and Norton, including Rosebud Smiddy, and the many wonderful people we met and experiences Bev and I had while we were at the College.”

– **Nancy Davies ‘77, Richmond**

“The nurturing and guidance I received at the College, from the Science Department, and other faculty and administration, helped me to want to be the best teacher I could be. I hope everyday that I give to my students the same sense of caring I felt from my professors.

Even though I did not attend UVa-Wise to become a teacher, I feel the education I received still provided an excellent foundation for me to be an educator. Many of the things I do personally and professionally I can relate back to my experiences as a student and chemistry major at the College. Every day that I stand in my classroom, there are moments when my mind jumps back to Walter Crouse, Margie Tucker, Van Daniel, Roy Wells, and Wayne Edwards.

My life as an educator has been extremely good. For those considering education as a major and a profession, I advise you to do it because there is a burning desire within your soul that connects you to it. You will not be paid well for your efforts. You will have more paperwork than you can ever hope to manage. Your student teaching experience will not prepare you for managing discipline in your classroom. . . if you understand that teaching and learning often occur outside of the normal eight-hour workday, that faculty need to help and be supportive of one another, that at the end of the day you can reflect upon it and find that you have made a positive impact on someone’s life, then you can be successful.”

– **from a 1994 graduate who asked to remain anonymous**

“The hands-on experience that I received at UVa-Wise was incredible! My professors did more than just teach me from the textbooks, they prepared me for the classroom. The partnership that the local schools took on with UVa-Wise to help prepare the student teachers in the educational program was phenomenal! I had so much knowledge, materials, and experience before I ever entered my own classroom that made me so much more prepared than other beginning teachers.

I’ll never forget my first teaching experience in Oliver Springs, Tenn. I was preparing my classroom for that first day of school and another new teacher came in my room and could not believe all the materials I had. She was amazed at how much preparation I had done, and it was all because of projects assigned by the professors at UVa-Wise.

This proves that not all schools take the time to prepare their student teachers for the classroom. Some schools are all about the books, and I got that knowledge and a whole lot more at UVa-Wise. Professor Sandra Richardson has been one of the most influential people in my career. She has not only been a wonderful professor, but a friend who has been there throughout the years to help me with my career. Especially after graduation, as I was entering my new teaching career, she spent many hours with me on the phone when I would call with questions or situations that I just wasn’t sure how to handle. I am so thankful for my experiences at UVa-Wise and for all the professors who cared enough to really prepare me for the career that I was about to face.”

– **Penny Odum Herrell ‘94, Clinton, Tenn.**

“I feel that today, more than ever, young people need us, and they need mentors much like what I received from my four years at UVa-Wise. I could not have been more proud of where I am today, and the college I attended. I tell everyone I meet that education is the top priority at UVa-Wise for any student and for the ones that will teach others after they leave. Professors Richard Davidson and Mary Ramseyer not only encouraged me, they were the perfect examples of what you should be if you want to help people in education.

I am grateful to every faculty member at the College between 1993-97 who made my life better and more meaningful by showing me the right way to be a teacher. . . My four years at UVa-Wise are irreplaceable and I am forever in awe of the awesome people that work for the students and with the students day in and day out.”

– **Leslie Roberts Mutter ‘97, Galax**

*This is the first in a continuing series of articles about the ways in which UVa-Wise alumni are making a difference in schools across Virginia and beyond. Alumni who are working or have worked as teachers are invited to share their comments for inclusion in an upcoming issue of The UVa-Wise Magazine. E-mail [alumni@uwawise.edu](mailto:alumni@uwawise.edu) or call 276/328-0130.*