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THE EDUCATIONAL CAREER OF BETH JANTZ

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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, ACES 803

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CHAPTER II: INTERVIEW WITH BETH JANTZ

Beth Jantz is well known in Dodge City and other parts of Kansas for the work she has done in the field of education. She has been involved in education in a variety of ways for over fifty seven years.

In the 1930's and 40's, there were only a few professions open to women. Most women became either a nurse or a teacher. Although Beth's mother and several of her aunts were teachers, Beth chose to go into nursing after high school.

Beth began a nursing program in Kansas City, but having very little experience except for farm life, she got terribly homesick and returned home to Kirwin, Kansas, after only three weeks into the training program.

When Beth returned home her parents took her to Fort Hays State University to register her for the teacher training program. Although, she started three weeks late in the fall semester she was still able to earn her teaching certificate. At that time teachers could teach for three years with only one year of college education. For an additional year of training they would receive a Life Certificate enabling them to teach the rest of their lives without receiving any further education or training.

In order to get a teaching job in the 1930's, a teacher had to go "hunt" up the job. Beth began to look

for her first teaching job by locating the three school board members who were in charge of school operations in one Phillips County district. There were only three members on school boards at that time and prospective teachers had to interview with each member to be accepted for a teaching position.

Beth's last name was similar to the name of a local minister and when she approached the first school board member he said, "I don't want any part of you. You're a preacher's daughter." He would not even listen to her.

This bothered Beth, but she did not let it discourage her. She persevered and proceeded to find the other two board members and interview with them. They consented to give her the job at Inavale School.

The school was a one room school house where she had eight students, grades first through eighth. At that time the school agenda consisted primarily of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Seventh and eighth graders were required to take county exams to decide if they would advance to the next grade. Beth remembered working a great deal with her eighth grade student to ensure he would advance and fortunately he did pass to ninth grade.

Teachers in one room schools were also responsible for tending the fires during the winter, carrying fuel in and ashes out. As teacher, Beth had to haul water from across the road to be used at the school.

Rural schools were also considered to be community centers. The teacher's desk was elevated on a platform in the front of the room, somewhat like a stage. Once a month at Inavale School they would have a what they called a "Literary Night" where people would perform whatever talents they had. Sometimes they would have a box supper.

After teaching one more year at a different one room school house Beth wanted to get out into the world and experience other avenues while she was young and unattached. She worked for a soil conservation office as secretary working with crop insurance. She then moved to Wichita to try a new job working for Boeing during World War II.

After marrying in 1948, and staying home a number of years to raise her children, Beth did finally go back into education. She believed that education was always in her blood, but she was inspired to get a degree because of her younger sister's experience. Her sister lost her husband and had to find a way of supporting herself and her three children. Beth saw her sister's difficulties and thought about what type of "insurance" she had if that would happen to her. She knew a teaching certificate would be a type of insurance in case she was

forced to support herself and her children. So, in 1958, she decided to pursue a teaching degree. By that time a teacher needed a four year college degree to receive a teaching certificate.

When Beth returned to teaching she noticed several changes. The biggest change from being a rural school teacher was having only one grade in a class. She noticed, however, there was still an emphasis on basic academics--reading, writing and arithmetic.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's there were not many external mandates or requirements made on the schools in regards to special classes such as physical education, library or special education. There were, however, music teachers who were not available at rural schools.

There were no school lunch programs at that time. The children either walked home for lunch or brought a sack lunch. Lunch programs were not implemented in schools until the mid 1960's.

When Beth finished her bachelor degree she began teaching at Central Elementary School in Dodge City where she lived at the time. She then transferred to Northwest Elementary in Dodge City to teach fourth grade.

The Northwest principal, Jane Robinson, had to leave for one year to work on a federally funded planning

grant, so the superintendent and the Board of Education asked Beth to serve as principal for that year.

Beth had a positive experience serving as principal and believed the staff pulled together well to keep things going while Mrs. Robinson was away. It was during that year that Northwest did start a lunch program. Although Beth and the teachers did not want the lunch program, the parents were in favor of it. Northwest was one of the last schools in the district to establish a lunch program probably because of the higher economic level of the school population.

Jane Robinson was a friend and mentor to Beth during her teaching years. After encouragement by Mrs. Robinson, Beth took a year off to get her Masters in Administration and Supervision.

For her master's project Beth was interested in researching the concept of middle schools. Her advisor, who was then the head of the Education Department, told her the idea was "stupid". However, Beth persevered and showed him articles about middle schools and talked to him about the validity of the project. He still said no, but Beth finally convinced him it was a viable topic so he allowed her to do her master's thesis on middle schools.

That was 1968, and today there is a middle school in Dodge City that was opened four years ago. Many school

districts throughout the United States have changed from junior highs to middle schools.

Upon returning from college Beth taught fourth grade at Lincoln Elementary School in Dodge City for one year.

Then in 1969, Beth was asked to serve as director of a special program called the Educational Professions Development Act. The assistant superintendent of Dodge City, in response to the tremendous teacher shortage, got funding for the program in order to train teachers. The program recruited teachers who would be ready for certification in one year. It offered to pay for their college expenses for the year. The program was funded for four years.

They trained approximately twenty teachers a year. They also trained ten teacher aides, now called paraprofessionals. The program helped solve some of the teacher shortages in the area. Many of the teachers and paraprofessional who participated in this program are still working in the Dodge City school district.

Beth had applied for various administrative positions that became available. In 1973-1974, she was asked to serve as Director of Elementary Education for USD 443 in Dodge City. During her time as director Beth assisted with many programs. They emphasized reading at the time getting funding for the "Right to Read" program for three years. These funds were used to select and

develop the SARI (Systematic Approach to Reading Improvement) program. Even though the SARI program is no longer in existence in the Dodge City school district there are remnants of the program evidenced by the grade level outcomes and objectives.

Beth was instrumental in obtaining a federally funded training grant for southwest Kansas Chapter I reading teachers. The program offered college credit through Fort Hays State University for inservice training. Four inservice training days were offered during the year for the teachers. This program was well received and improved the Chapter I reading programs throughout southwest Kansas.

Another program which Beth assisted with was Assertive Discipline. This a discipline program that uses positive reinforcement. Assertive Discipline is still used in the Dodge City Schools.

In 1975, the superintendent asked Beth to be Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Development. During that time they began the development of Effective Schools.

When the superintendent left for another job Beth served as interim superintendent. She observed at that time how well the staff worked together while they waited for new leadership. Beth credits co-workers, like Loyal Johnson, for assisting her that year.

In May of 1989, Beth formally retired, but before she did, she signed up to run for the Dodge City School Board position. Elected in April she began serving on the school board the following July.

Of all the different positions Beth held in her lifetime she stated that she enjoyed being a teacher and actually working with the children as her favorite. Even while working in administration Beth tried to visit the schools and be with the children. She announced the words at spelling bees at several elementary schools. She said the schools "were where the action was" and the children kept a person young.

In those days somebody did not transfer to another school unless there was a problem, but Beth chose to transfer to gain new experiences. Many people asked her what had happened that she caused her to be transferred not thinking it was her chose. Beth taught at many of the schools in Dodge City, Central, Northwest, Lincoln, Head Start and Miller.

Beth had also taught teachers at the college level. She stated that the most important quality a good teacher must have is to like the job and enjoy teaching. It was extremely important to care about the children and like being with children. Some other qualities she mentioned were preparation, planning, organization and continued growth of the teacher through further education. She did

Jantz, when are you going to start saying those funny things you said when my brother was in your class?" Beth asked, "What do you mean?" The student began to say things like, "don't pull my leg" and other similar sayings.

Beth's overall teaching philosophy is that learning is a lifetime process. People should continue to learn to enable them to help others. Beth has lived this philosophy by continuing her own education and her educational career throughout her life.

Beth related how she has made several friends during the course of her work and some in the most unusual circumstances. She was responsible for organizing a college class for teachers but the instructor decided not to teach the class at the last moment. The class was held anyway because of the teamwork and perseverance of the teachers and Beth. She made some life long friendships through of this experience.

Beth stated that change is important in a person's life. She said that, "It used to be said that apple pie and motherhood were the only things you could always count on, but now you had to add in change." She believed change was must more evident now because of the increase in the pace of change.

Beth does not have any future plans except to continue what she is presently doing. She works as a

school board member, volunteers at the social security office, with the American Cancer Society and the FAST organization. She has been told by friends that there is plenty to do "out there" and if she shops around she will find something she would like to do.