

# Teaching continues to be Sara Slayton's love

**S**ara Slayton discovered early in her career that she wanted to teach young children. Even though today she's teaching college students in the UW-L School of Education, she's still doing just that — in a round about way.

As one of the two faculty responsible for the early childhood education program in the educational studies department, Slayton impacts hundreds of students heading out to teach in child care centers and elementary schools.

Slayton's interest in early childhood sparked in 1976 when she landed a job at a child care center in Viroqua. A recent elementary education graduate from UW-Platteville, Slayton was happy to take the job after getting nowhere in a flooded elementary teaching market.

"That was a turning point in my career," Slayton explains. "I got so focused on working with the pre-kindergarten children, that I knew that's what I wanted to continue doing."

**W**hile at Viroqua, she oversaw a student teacher from UW-L. That student's faculty adviser, Byron Meek, talked to Slayton about the university's new early childhood education program. She started work on her master's, and after getting the degree in 1980, she became assistant director of La Crosse Day Care Centers. She started teaching at Western Wisconsin Technical College in 1982, and a year later started teaching early childhood education part-time at UW-L. She's been on campus since — but she's done more than teach.

Slayton served on a campus advisory committee on establishing child care for students. A student survey showed strong interest in the service, and Slayton was tabbed to establish the program in 1984. "I wrote the center's original policies and ordered

everything from the scissors to the trikes," she recalls.

For five years, Slayton orchestrated the facility while maintaining a half-time teaching load. In 1989, she became a full-time academic staff lecturer. She still keeps in touch with the child center, which has

since moved from the old power plant building to a new, modern facility in the Recreational Eagle Center. "The bond to the center is still close," she explains. "I greatly admire the staff members and excellent program at the child center. In my opinion, it remains the best child care facility in the area."

**B**ut it's teaching that drew Slayton back. "When I'm in the classroom

with the students — that's the piece I love," she says.

That love is quickly picked up by the students. Slayton consistently receives some of the highest student evaluation scores in the department. "She teaches what she preaches," notes Assistant Professor Barbara Chaney, who teaches the other early childhood classes.

Slayton works closely with all the university's early childhood education minors — teaching one of their first classes, one midway, and one before they graduate. "I get to have this repeated contact with the students," she explains. "I think it's just wonderful for me to be able to see them blossom in their short time on campus."

Slayton is the first to admit that she doesn't fit the typical model of a university professor. "I like being a square peg. What I am is a teacher," she says. "I take great pride in my teaching. I didn't start out to be a university person. I wanted to be a teacher and that continues to be my love and, I hope, by talent."

-Brad Quarberg, University Relations



## The Sara Slayton File

- **Lecturer**, Educational Studies Department, since 1983
- **Founder and first director** of the Campus Child Center 1984-1989
- **Recreated** the Marian Hammes Early Childhood Resource Center
- **Master's** from UW-L; **bachelor's** from UW-Platteville