Close your eyes. Imagine a class of 15 students. (Nice, isn’t it?) Now imagine they span a range of kindergarten through eighth grade. (Bear with us…) Now imagine you teach these students in a one-room schoolhouse. In rural Nevada. The closest town is 70 miles away.

In Instructor, we’ve encountered teachers with some unique challenges, but this one piqued our interest. We reached out to Lyn to hear more of her story.

You’re in a rural setting. Just how rural are we talking?

Ely, the closest town, consists of two stoplights, one supermarket, a hardware store, a doctor, a dentist, and that’s pretty much it. Nye County School District is comprised of 6,000 students over 18,000 square miles. The closest school is 140 miles away. I’ve been at the Duckwater School for 10 years, and my first teaching job was at another one-room school on the reservation, so I’m used to this kind of environment.

Many of us would consider teaching in such a rural area to be a challenge. How do you feel about being so remote?

I think every teacher has a challenge no matter where they are or who they teach. It’s just that our challenges are different. My setting can be a challenge in terms of getting information, for example, or taking a field trip. Sometimes I think my students do not have as wide a set of experiences as kids who live in a city might have. But on the other hand, I don’t have to worry about the violence or politics that occur in some city schools. I look at teachers who have 40 kids, and I think...
they’re the ones in the trenches.

**How does technology help in your teaching?**

Technology is a huge part of our learning experience. We have a document camera, projectors, and a brand-new SMART Board. We have a few students who take violin lessons through a virtual studio in Iowa called Violinnovation. There isn’t a local instructor, so we use Skype for these lessons, and I project them onto a six-by-six-foot screen. They run a finger under the words while we film. In kindergarten, we make videos to practice writing the letters in the alphabet. My other kids make podcasts all the time. And they’re all super readers. We use the Internet for research, online quizzes to prepare for tests, Google Maps, and virtual field trips.

**What is it like teaching such a large grade range?**

I typically don’t teach whole-group lessons, although I have done what I call “peel-off lessons,” usually for math. First I teach an introductory lesson and have “peel-off lessons,” usually for math. First, kindergartners and first graders are three grade levels. For example, my students absorb the material, I excuse them to do seatwork. I continue the lesson to stay engaged. Then, as the younger students absorb the material, I excuse them onto a six-by-six-foot screen. There isn’t a local instructor, so we use Skype for these lessons, and I project them onto a six-by-six-foot screen. We have a few students who take violin lessons through a virtual studio in Iowa called Violinnovation. There isn’t a local instructor, so we use Skype for these lessons, and I project them onto a six-by-six-foot screen. They run a finger under the words while we film. In kindergarten, we make videos to practice writing the letters in the alphabet. My other kids make podcasts all the time. And they’re all super readers. We use the Internet for research, online quizzes to prepare for tests, Google Maps, and virtual field trips.

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**What’s it like teaching with only one other adult?**

Brenda came to our school seven years ago as a custodian when she was 21 years old. She did a fantastic job, and I’ve already had ‘em. If they feel well enough to come to school, send ‘em and we’ll all just be scratchy together.

**How do you manage students with behavioral issues?**

In a lot of ways, I feel like a mom or grandmother to all of them, so I handle behavioral issues much like I would with my own children. Obviously, we begin with positive reinforcement and make a big deal of how much we like it when someone does the right thing. Rarely, we do time-outs, and the students know that when someone is in a time-out they don’t have any interaction with them until they’re off time-out. Like any other teacher, I involve parents when it becomes apparent that what I’m doing isn’t working. My favorite saying is that you have to find out what a child’s currency is, what is the thing they like the most to have or to do? Then you can use that as a tool to manipulate behavior.

**Your mother, grandmother, and aunts were one-room-schoolhouse teachers. What is it about the nature of your job that has made it a family tradition?**

We all grew up in rural farming areas and so we weren’t afraid of working long hours to complete a job, and I think we were all raised by great parents who made sure we knew and exhibited the value of a work ethic. I think also that women in my mom’s and grandma’s generations only had a few career choices, so it was probably natural to have migrated toward it, and one-room schools were typical in the rural areas in which they lived. For myself, I think that it was an adventure.