

Pauline Centers

12/03/13

Interview Report

On December 3, 2013 I interviewed Annette King at Oneida Nation Elementary School. The interview lasted thirty minutes. Annette (is what the students call her) graduated from UWGB with a double major in Humanistic Studies and History and a minor in Spanish. She returned to UWGB a year later to complete her teacher certification. After teaching for 6 years she returned to school and completed her special education studies at UW-Oshkosh, earning two additional license certifications in Cross Categorical, and Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities. Annette has been teaching for twenty years. She spent six of those years in general education and the remaining fourteen as a special educator.

Currently Annette has ten students on her case load that she works with on a daily basis. This number varies from year to year depending on the number of incoming students and needs of those students. Most of the students she works with meet with her twice a day for reading, written language, and/or math services.

I asked Annette, “What categories are the exceptional children you work with considered as?” She replied, “At this time, I work with students with learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, and autism.” In the past she has also provided instruction to a number of students with intellectual disabilities.

Annette claims the best thing about teaching kids with special needs is taking a child who thinks he ‘cannot’, helping him understand his disability and what it takes to learn, and seeing the ‘ah hah’ moments in his eyes as he grows. For her, 8th grade graduation is difficult. Her

students are super excited and ready to move on, but she fears she may never see them again and she worries about their wellbeing.

When I asked Annette about her challenges and frustrations with parents, she replied, “One of the most frustrating events as a teacher is the absentee parent who isn’t around for anything, not even attending an IEP meeting for their own child. Or the parent who undermines the importance of the lessons or subjects that I am trying to teach their child”. Though, she admits there are good supportive parents out there. The best part of working with parents, is finding an ally in the struggle to educate their child. They may even assist in making the program and/or school a better place for all kids.

Annette has been both a general and special education teacher and she states the job of special educator is much more involved, consuming and heart-breaking. Although she “teaches only a few kids” as many will point out, it isn’t about numbers, it’s about needs. It’s about providing a quality program to the individual, and balancing the individual needs with the needs of all the other individuals in the program. It’s also about being responsible to the child and his/her parents each year at the annual IEP. If she can’t say, “I did what I could”, then she feels like she failed.

Annette’s list of her professional responsibilities when it comes to her exceptional children is endless. She: completes academic achievement testing (initial and re-evaluation every three years, if needed); writes Individual Education Programs (IEP) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) based on the results of assessments, progress, and individual need; monitors & reports IEP goal progress to parents, SpEd coordinator, and BIE (Bureau of Indian Education) ; monitors academic and behavioral progress in the general education classrooms; plans & provides the identified special services and time in the IEP, and documents delivery of

services to BIE; writes weekly lesson plans for individual students or groups; collaborates & teaches with reading specialists in the RtI program (Response to Intervention); provides assistance to general education staff with accommodations/modifications to work; assists students with general education work completion, gives additional support or time when and where possible within her program; completes required special education paperwork (prior written notices, invites, implementation notices, amendments, service logs, in addition to IEPs, progress reports); calls home to report behavior issues and academic progress, or to set up annual IEP meetings ;calls parents and conducts home visits to explain, deliver, and get signatures on special education paperwork; and she is the teacher, parent, nurse, and counselor as all her students.

As far as professional training goes, Annette takes six credits every five years as required for her license renewal. She also takes any additional classes or training required by the BIE or Wisconsin DPI. Any other classes or training she takes depends on her personal evaluation, needs or interest.

Finally, Annette's greatest frustration of being a Special Education Educator is the paperwork required to do her job. The paperwork "sucks" time from teaching, as well as her personal life. She states this is the toughest job she has ever held.

In conclusion, I agree it takes an extraordinary teacher to want to teach exceptional students and take on that responsibility. The sense of fulfillment Annette receives when a student makes gains and feels pride in his achievement might be enough to make me lean that way in a couple of years. Annette states a child that says, "Hey, you just taught me something. You're a good teacher!" is the fuel she needs to keep her going. I wonder if that same fuel is

enough to drive me to do all that paper work. Although I know it is not possible, I would like to teach without doing all paperwork.