

Wisconsin Classroom Teachers
afc2013/017

Teachers Offstage--The Occupational Folklore of Wisconsin Teachers: Archie Green Fellows Project, 2013-2014

Donna Recker interview, 2013-12-05 : interview conducted by Mary M. Hoefflerle

Interview ID: afc2013017_00863

Date: December 5, 2013

Duration: 00:50:27

00:00:00 Introduction. Mary Hoefflerle interviewing elementary art teacher Donna Recker at Emmeline Cook Elementary School in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on December 5, 2013. Donna read and signed release form.

00:00:22 Educational background and years of teaching: Always liked art, people's praise built her confidence, phenomenal high school art teacher. Undergraduate degree in Art Education at UW Oshkosh. Worked for Americore at Boys and Girls Club art. Taught two years, then got a Master's Degree through UW LaCrosse Learning Community, taught total of 11 years at elementary. Since one of her schools is a charter school, she attended many workshops and professional development on brain-based learning and conscious discipline.

00:05:00 Typical day: Arrive at 7:30, set up supplies for three different grade levels in different places in the room, turn on computer since she uses power point for every class. Doesn't chat with anyone in the morning, check email three times a day. 50-minute class periods, sometimes five minutes between class periods – enough to enter daily grades in web grader. Eat lunch quickly in 20 minutes at one school, then prep for afternoon classes. In the other school, eat in lounge with other teachers. Some days, teach only one afternoon class, other days three classes. Teach 24 sections a week, technically not full time, but it's not going to last much longer. Full time is 25 classes a week. Students leave at 2:35. After school, in one school, she shares the room with the music teacher, so cleans up everything. Then, enters and fixes grades in the computer. Do email. Some prep for next day's lessons. Leaves at 3:15 due to 24 sections.

00:11:36 Work at home: No need to bring work home anymore. Knows her job, has things organized, and due to 24 sections. Not the case in past years.

00:12:24 Joy in her work: Likes the kids, their enthusiasm, their perspective. Their creative ideas. The job meets her need to be creative –creative lesson planning, demonstrating. Connecting to kids.

00:13:18 Dislikes about her work: Some of the things that happened in the district, state and community. Feels like she is paying more attention to behaviors rather than teaching art. Feels that the state and district have made things more difficult than they need to be. Children only have one 20-minute recess per day – they used to have three recesses. Kids are squirrely. No longer have one school for special needs help – now the special needs are spread through the district, not getting the resources they need. Now have LD CD ELL CDMS students in one class.

Wisconsin Classroom Teachers
afc2013/017

00:17:00 Classroom teachers: Stressed by adoption of Common Core Standards and testing. She hasn't been as effected by these changes. Some new teachers aren't making it three months. They are told to leave or are resigning because of the workload – its insanity. Veteran teachers have enough tools in their belt to handle it. Mountain of work that's ridiculous. This is primarily an elementary problem. Suggests 75 minutes of art a week since its cut out of the classroom. Classroom teachers who like art and know that kids need it, integrate art. New teachers are not – too overwhelmed with other duties.

00:20:48 Relationship with colleagues: Depends on the school – she worked in 5 different buildings in 11 years. At E. Cook, before Walker's turnover in which the school lost 40 percent of the staff, this school used to be the most welcoming school – the staff was like family. Lost principals, people are nice but not much cohesion. At Shapiro, since it's an open concept building, the staff is closer – they literally see each other more. Closest friend is the janitor. He knows everything. He talks to all the other teachers. Self-serving relationship with classroom teachers – if she has a problem with a student, she has to hand it off to the classroom teacher and need their help.

00:24:00 Principals: She asks for money for supplies and need the supplies purchased. So when the money disappears or if she asks for help and it's not honored, that makes a poor principal. She's very independent and doesn't ask for much. If she asks for help, she has tried everything else. Most principals are good. The district level administration is not well-liked. Frustrated with scheduling. No adaptive art in elementary school, but have pull out adaptive art in middle and high school.

00:27:45 Relationship with other k-12 art teachers. See each other once a month for an hour. When all k-12 art teachers get together, less productive. Doesn't have that much in common with high school. Can support middle school to some degree. Pam organizes the meetings for elementary art teachers and keeps them on task – focus on topics of curriculum and student learning outcomes.

00:31:05 Job related jokes, traditions, nicknames: Hardly any time to talk to colleagues. The custodian and I have lots of fun together.

00:32:00 Staff meetings: many of the topics doesn't pertain to specialists. One principal makes an effort to include her and other specialists.

00: 32:47 Relationships with parents: Some fabulous parents providing support and supplies. Strong PTO that funds collaborative art projects. Used to attend the parent-teacher conferences to discuss behavior problems with parents of difficult students – very little impact, so stopped doing it. Story about an angry parent upset with a classroom management decision.

Wisconsin Classroom Teachers
afc2013/017

00:39:20 Cycles of the school year: No single school art shows, so all the elementary schools display work at the Masonic Temple in November. Each teacher submits 20 pieces per school. On-line art shows – each school takes a month. Twice a year, work is displayed at Central Office – just two works per school. In the spring, they create a group library art show. Important to put work in public to garner support.

00:42:00 Response from people when she tells them she is an art teacher: Oh that must be fun! Stereotype of art teacher: disorganized, flighty, super creative, laid back – she isn't any of those. She's very organized and does squish student creativity a little bit, but makes learning safe.

00:43:45 School politics: The protests and the political upheaval in recent years didn't affect her that much. At the time, she was pregnant and was on maternity leave and focused on family rather than job. She didn't like how teachers were villain-ized, but for the most part she wasn't involved. At every level the protests failed, so felt it best to put her head in the sand.

00:45:20 Changes in her job: Felt that kids came to school with experience with hands on stuff. Now, when they enter school, it's as if it's the first time they've seen paint. They are more computer-savvy and have streets smarts, but know how to do less and still have more to say to you. Much more verbal and visual but less fine motor ability. TV is introduced too soon instead of play dough, sandbox, playing with toys. Not much change in ethnic diversity. Higher poverty rate, though.

00:48:15 Advice for new teachers: Don't do it! If she was just starting out today, not sure that she would choose this path due to all the things that have happened in the last few years. Also – it's hard to find a job, and if you land a job, will it pay your bills? Not a lot of nice things to say about that right now.

00:50:27 End of interview.