

Lauri Oliver – Full Interview

- Lauri:** This is Lauri Oliver with Wynonna Senior High School or Wynonna area public schools I guess.
- Cheryl:** And how long have you actually been teaching?
- Lauri:** This is my 16th year.
- Cheryl:** Oh my goodness, that's awesome. Could you just tell me a little bit about some of the challenges that you were facing when you contacted Susan and SOAR Study Skills?
- Lauri:** Basically, I was trying to design a study skills class and did an online search to find some good resources and hers came up. And when I looked at the program and how organized the books were and everything, that's what appealed to me. There were other programs out there and there were things I could have done myself but because she had some research base with it and that it was pretty coordinated in the teacher's guide, that's what attracted me to that particular thing.
- So we started out with the freshman because we have 9th through 12th grade at our high school and our challenges were that the freshman were coming in from a middle school that's five through eight and there's just no consistent method of teaching how to take notes or organization and things like that so that's why I was looking for resources.
- Cheryl:** So you're trying to basically provide your incoming freshmen with a foundation of study skills so that moving forward they would obviously...
- Lauri:** With the idea of them using it throughout their high school career and it was an experiment so we don't get all of the freshman, I get some that are identified as students that are at risk, failing so those are the kids that I get, which is exciting.
- Cheryl:** Oh, yeah that is a challenging group.
- Lauri:** It's very challenging. I have the class from Hell over at the middle school right now. Seventh and eighth graders, it's like the first day of class and they are already off the wall and I am like, you're kidding me. I'm 6' 3" with shoes on; you would think they'd mess with me. I was like man, so I have to go in there today, it's my second day with them, and we're going to establish rules as a class and try to do some things. But yeah, they are a very challenging group.

- Cheryl:** Wow, I've got to give you credit for that, my husband had worked with an intermediate school district and worked a lot with those kinds of kids. He wasn't the teacher but he assisted with that quite a bit and I remember boy that takes a special person to work with those kids so I have to commend you for that.
- Lauri:** Well I hope I can pull it off because I think the biggest challenge is they don't care.
- Cheryl:** Well that's right, that's right that they've never had the situation where they felt they could thrive or even cared whether they did.
- Lauri:** Right, so I'm using Susan's – some of the language she uses to introduce the program which is some of the stuff online about to get the kid buy in you can, a can help you get your homework done faster and read textbooks easier and all of those kinds of things. So I'm hoping if they listen long enough that they'll buy in a little bit.
- Cheryl:** Yeah, that you can get at least their attention long enough to get them to try it.
- Lauri:** That's what I am hoping.
- Cheryl:** Now the focus group that you had initially, how many students was that that you were involved with?
- Lauri:** A total of 60 kids.
- Cheryl:** Okay, and then this is a little smaller group that you have coming in now?
- Lauri:** Thirty.
- Cheryl:** Okay, but a different type of kid?
- Lauri:** Yeah.
- Cheryl:** Or is it still both of those challenged kids?
- Lauri:** No, these are kids that are failing school and they just created a class, they told me last spring, there like, ah we're doing this at the middle school and we want you to come over and try to help these kids. So they just got the books in and we're going to see what happens.
- Cheryl:** Wow, well I guess on the positive side if you can make traction with these then you're probably really going to get their attention and be a wonderful thing and not just for you but everybody else after that.

- Lauri:** Right, I'm going by her 80/20 rule.
- Cheryl:** Yeah, she explained that to me little bit, she said that she spent some time with you talking about that and that's really interesting.
- Lauri:** It is and I won't be completely brokenhearted if I get 80% of them in the end.
- Cheryl:** That's right, at least you feel like you've accomplished something right?
- Lauri:** Right, well we really want to see results.
- Cheryl:** Yeah, I don't blame you, I don't blame you what so ever. Well, when you were working SOAR since that time, I should say, taking that little focus group of kids, what has changed with them? What did you see through that process in your experience of working with SOAR with the kids?
- Lauri:** More confidence for sure. The kids that were actually using these strategies were finding that they actually worked and they were surprised, oh wow, this really works. And the reinforcing using some of the, like even the note taking thing. So it's like, are you taking the notes the way I showed you how to take them, the way we practice doing them in class? No, all right so then, you reinforce that and they finally use it and they are like oh, this really worked, wow.
- So it does give them confidence and once again, I think that my biggest challenge to using the program was accountability, how to keep track of making sure that they are using the binder correctly, doing the locker checks and she does have a matrix kind of put together. I hadn't been using that so I'm going to be using that this time to see if that helps me out a little.
- Cheryl:** So that you can get that other 20%?
- Lauri:** But I would say definitely better confidence and they are surprised that things worked.
- Cheryl:** Now, do you find better results too as far as the results of their test taking and how they did in class itself?
- Lauri:** Yes, they definitely got better grades and they saw some increase in their grades – the ones that used the strategies.
- Cheryl:** Well, that's great news because; you know also I would think that, that in itself too would help them gain more confidence in itself.

- Lauri:** When I think what would be the true test is to see what their grades are after this next trimester.
- Cheryl:** Right.
- Lauri:** If they keep using these strategies beyond the classroom.
- Cheryl:** Well, and I think too probably it would be helpful for you as hopefully you expand this to more people in the school then more people are using it, then you'll have that accountability within the teachers to, which are probably really wonderful where you could go back and check and say if you're having trouble in your class, are you taking them back as a refresher so to speak.
- Lauri:** Yeah, and I think that's important, it would really be nice; I think it would work well if all teachers were using the same strategies. So if we could get even the middle schools, if I could talk them into, if they could see results and maybe we could do a school-wide thing at the middle school. You know, and train those teachers over there and get them using it and then everyone is using the same thing and it's reinforcing every class, then I think it's really going to work. Meet in a little small corner, we're trying to get a few kids and keep them going.
- Cheryl:** Right.
- Lauri:** I think that's the hard part.
- Cheryl:** Yeah, just kind of being all out on your own...
- Lauri:** Right.
- Cheryl:** And try to make this work.
- Lauri:** I think it really helps if all of the teachers, and I mean I let them know what I am doing.
- Cheryl:** Right.
- Lauri:** But they actually were using the same types of strategies and reinforcing those in the other classes. Okay, we are going to take notes and remember how we do that? Pull out your planner and...
- Cheryl:** Right.
- Lauri:** Write this in there and so that's not happening, yet.

Cheryl: Yet, I like that. Well from a teacher's standpoint, tell me a little bit about that. I can see where the results that you've gotten working from the student's standpoint of view but as a teacher, what has that done for you? What have you gained from working with this as far as a tool to utilize with your students?

Lauri: Well, definitely using the same tool for myself as far as the binder system and organizing my classes and things like that so that I can show the students that I'm using that and as far as – I've always used a planner and been organized in that type of thing but instituting the binder system and then in my other classes, even the class that isn't my study skills class, using that to show them how to use that same format for note taking and to try to reinforce some of those strategies in other classes even though I'm not officially teaching them. Does that make sense?

Cheryl: Yes, that makes total sense.

Lauri: So I've found that to be beneficial for me and for the students because then I have a consistent way that I'm expecting them to do things.

Cheryl: And you're actually showing them as well. You know, by example, leading by example, which is always really obviously important when it comes to kids and students.

Lauri: Yep, very true.

Cheryl: Well, it sounds to me like the process, the whole experience of working with Susan and her organization was a positive experience for you and you are having great results with it. Just on a personal level, what was it like working with Susan?

Lauri: Oh, she's very personable and helpful and I had called her with a couple of things I was having problems with and she was able to share some insight and very good at listening as far as what my particular problem was and helping me brainstorm a way to get around it, which was very good about that.

Cheryl: Now through the process as well and one of the things that she likes me to check in with you on is not just obviously getting the positive things, which I know she appreciates and will appreciate hearing your kind words to her. But also, was there any areas in working with her where you felt perhaps you might have experienced some limitations or do you have any comments you would like to relay back to Susan in regard to that?

Lauri: I'm trying to think if there was anything in particular that...

- Cheryl:** Or maybe even suggestions on any additional services that she might be able to provide that would be useful to you.
- Lauri:** Gosh, that one requires a little thought.
- Cheryl:** And that is something too you can get back to her on but I know she really values the opinions and input of her clients since you guys are right in the field and things sometimes she might not even think about...
- Lauri:** Right, I think there were a couple of things that I suggested to her as far as the organization of the book. Like I thought that, the recording progress should be right away in the beginning because that way you can be right on board with the kids right away. Doing that, keeping track of their grades and then because the way I taught it of course it was toward the end and then kind of not really being able to reinforce that as much as I wanted to. But otherwise, as far as working with her or the program itself, I didn't really have anything that's coming to mind.
- Cheryl:** No, and that's fine, that's great actually but always like to give people the opportunity because sometimes you can get just wrapped up in all the good stuff but sometimes in other things, if there's other ideas that – like I said might never occur to Susan that might be helpful to you so I appreciate you.
- Lauri:** Well actually, I have my Masters in literacy education and I have found especially the asking questions section, it works really well with the reading stuff that I had learned in that program and I expanded quite a bit on the asking questions section as far as using what I have learned in my literacy program. So I think that fits really well in with students as far as that section it was probably the best one. I mean I know they need to be organized that that whole asking questions and interactive piece on how to read textbooks more efficiently and all that, take notes and study really worked well with the literacy stuff.
- Cheryl:** Wonderful, I'll definitely make sure that I pass that information on to her, that's good information for her to know.
- Lauri:** Okay.
- Cheryl:** Alright, well I just have one last question and then we can wrap this up and let you get on with your day.
- Lauri:** Okay.
- Cheryl:** If someone was considering working with SOAR, what do you think would be important for them to know that maybe you haven't already shared with me?

Lauri: I guess what would be important to know is that they are pretty familiar with the material before they try to just teach it and wing it, to have spent some time with it and understand how it works and maybe even try out some of the strategies a little bit before they try to teach them to the kids. And also beginning with the informative piece to the parents, I think is really important if they are behind the family meeting and they understand the use of the planner and the binder system and some of the logic behind what we are trying to do at school with the kids. If the parents understand then I think that is important for whoever might be considering teaching the program.

Cheryl: Yes, I think that would be real important for the parents to know that this type of a program is being offered. I think that would give them a lot of comfort.

Lauri: I love the homework part where one of the parents can sign up for that, I put that on my website for parents to sign up for that free newsletter if they are interested.

Cheryl: Well, that's a good idea, that's a great idea.

Lauri: Because then that fits right in with what we are doing at school. And I love the stuff she's got on their for the parents to do a little bit of their attitudes toward homework and kind of a little checklist on what they do with their kids as far as what level they should be working with their kids on homework and I love that part of it too so it's a good resource for them if they use it.

Cheryl: Well, it supports you too in what you're doing obviously, which is really important. You guys have enough – it's hard enough on your own out there so you have the parents support too I'm sure that's terrific.

Lauri: True enough.

Cheryl: Well thank you, Lauri, I so appreciate you taking time to talk with me and I'm so happy to hear that you had a great experience working with Susan and her organization.

Lauri: Yeah, I'll be looking forward to seeing what happens with this new bunch so...

Cheryl: Wonderful, I'm sure she will be staying in touch with you in getting your feedback to know how that goes for you as well.

Lauri: All right.

Cheryl: Well thank you and I hope you have a wonderful holiday.

Lauri: You too, take care.

Cheryl: Thank you.

Lauri: Bye-bye.

Cheryl: Bye-bye.