

Lauri Oliver - Shortened

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: 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. With the idea of them using it throughout their high school career so we don't get all of the freshman, I get some that are identified as students who are at risk, failing so those are the kids that I get.

Cheryl: 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 works, wow. So it does give them 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: 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. So I've found that to be beneficial for me and for the students because I have a consistent way that I'm expecting them to do things.

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.

Cheryl: If someone was considering working with SOAR, what do you think would be important for them to know?

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: In fact, I put that on that website for parents to sign up for that free newsletter if they are interested 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: 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.