

## Kaaren Adams

Kaaren Adams graduated from the University of Wisconsin La Crosse with a Bachelor of Science Degree in June 2003. She later earned her Master's Degree in Professional Development in May of 2007 from the University of Wisconsin La Crosse.

Kaaren's educational philosophy is woven from a variety of threads from her past, present, and future experiences as a teacher. Grounded in her personal beliefs and values about education is the fact that she is always evolving and changing as an educator.

Kara believes students can be successful regardless of the challenges they may face. Students in her classroom receive instruction that is tailored to meet their needs through a variety of means, including whole-group, small group, individual, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. Strengths are recognized and praised, while challenges are met with support and reinforcement. Students are viewed as individuals with unique talents and gifts to share and feel safe to take risks and learn from their mistakes. She believes in the importance of purposeful explicit instruction. Her lessons are carefully planned and prepared in advance and she is reflective upon their conclusion in order to assess their effectiveness.

When completing her graduate school work on differentiated instruction, she facilitated an activity which sought to highlight the ways that each individual student was smart. The children completed a survey which categorized them into groups of Self Smart, People Smart, Music Smart, Body Smart, etc. Each group was given an activity focusing on the same topic but tailored to their strengths. For example, the Music

Smart group made up a song about money, and the Art Smart group designed their own coins. Each group then shared their learning with the class and took pride in the different ways that they were “smart.” Capitalizing on student strengths and allowing them to work together in cooperative groups alongside students with varying abilities or different backgrounds allows them to feel confident in their skills, thus raising their achievement.

Kaaren also establishes a strong relationship with parents and always keeps the lines of communication open with her weekly newsletters, emails and notes home, and her classroom website and blog.

When asked about innovative projects and programs, Kaaren shared that in search of a way to keep her students engaged with a purposeful literacy activity during guided reading when she was busy with small groups of children, she wrote a letter to our school's Parent Teacher Organization, requesting funding for personal Mp3 players for students to use to listen to reading. Her request was approved and she was able to purchase seven Mp3 players were purchased. Her students love listening to stories using technology and this frees her up to devote more attention to small group instruction. Since the implementation of Mp3 players her students, several other teachers in her school have also purchased Mp3 players and her superintendent even visited her classroom to witness the students using them.

As for community service, Kaaren has been involved with the community in raising money for the Jefferson County Humane Society along with serving as a judge for the local interpreter reading contest. She recently served on a committee with the superintendent to work with our local Hoard Museum to determine a way to strengthen

our partnership and discuss options for making better use of the museum as a valuable community resource

In terms of unrealized goals or future professional development, Kaaren notes that with new curriculum development, the incorporation of the new standards, and the ongoing addition of new teaching materials, teachers are given heavy loads that are often difficult to carry. While she understands that these teaching requirements are necessary to keep up with the demands of society and our government, she notes that we as teachers sometimes struggle to keep up. She hopes that someday there may be an avenue for her to provide support so that teacher's jobs can be made easier. Whether it be through a coaching opportunity, facilitating a class, developing a website, serving as mentor, or some other means. She has ambitions to extend her teaching skills beyond the classroom of second graders.

From Director of Instruction Amy Oakley, she notes, "Kaaren is an amazing teacher. She embodies an incredible desire to learn and grow as a professional. Kaaren models lifelong learning in her own quest to constantly improve her student's achievement. She does this by reflecting on her own instructional practice – taking full responsibility of her own impact on learning that takes place in her room. Her willingness to learn new knowledge, identify areas that could be improved and put those ideas into action for the sake of her students makes her an invaluable member of our elementary team."

From a student, "I want you to know that Mrs. Adams is an amazing teacher. She taught me a real cool trick that helped me figure out when I should put a period at the end of the sentence and start the next sentence with a capital letter. She told me

that I should whisper the sentence to myself. She told me that everytime my voice dropped I should use a period and then follow it up with a capitol letter. It works great! I like to play school at home and pretend that I am a teacher like Mrs. Adams!"

With pleasure we forward the nomination of Kaaren Adams for the Kohl Fellowship Award.