



## **Leanne Bongers**

Leanne Bongers earned her Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She later earned her Master's Degree from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

When asked what her personal educational philosophy is and how she demonstrates it in her teaching style Leanne notes, "My educational philosophy is a lot like a maple tree. It has its basic shape and is deeply rooted, but over time it is ever-changing and continues to stretch and grow as a result of its environment. With each year that goes by, it gains another ring of experience that allows it to stand stronger and more confident in its field."

Leanne recognizes that her role is crucial in developing her student's academic and emotional well-being. She utilizes assessment, technology, and her knowledge of learning styles so that her students can achieve at their highest levels. Although she has an academic agenda, she also knows her fourth graders are real kids with real feelings. Because of this, she constantly observes her students' eyes, actions, comments, and writing as windows into their hearts and souls. Her students may be little in size, but some of them carry big issues that make listening and learning at school an even tougher challenge."

When asked how she works to raise achievement for all students, Leanne notes that she varies lessons and activities to match students' multiple intelligences and learning styles by using technology, music, movement, and art. She flexibly groups students with others based on similar and differing abilities so that they constantly learn from one another.

When asked what innovative projects/programs she has developed for and with students Leanne notes that the reading assessment she used on

her fourth graders at the beginning of the 2006 school year helped her discover that many of them struggled to read fluently. Literature on reading fluency revealed a method called Readers Theater that she decided to implement in her classroom as a way to address her findings. She wrote and received an Educational Grant for \$1,300 to fund the Readers Theater scripts needed for her action research. Throughout the 14-week study, she collected quantitative and qualitative data from parents, students, and her own informal and formal assessments in order to gain a well-rounded perspective regarding the effects Readers Theater had on her students' reading abilities. She was honored when the journal article she wrote about her research was selected as an exemplar by the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse graduate external review board. As a result of her research, she feels she has much more expertise regarding fluency and, more specifically, Readers Theater. She had the opportunity to share her results and the Readers Theater process with other educators at the UW-La Crosse Research Celebration and with third through fifth grade teachers at a reading in-service in our district. Leanne notes, "The School District of Fort Atkinson provides many opportunities for teachers to join curriculum teams throughout the year to improve teaching and learning in our schools. My participation on 15 of these teams has kept me knowledgeable and has allowed me to grow and learn with my colleagues."

When asked about unrealized goals she has for her classroom/professional development Leanne notes, she would like to further explore the 'layering of curriculum.' To start, she will select one of her units and use Bloom's taxonomy a model for higher order thinking, to design several tasks the students will shop from in order to process the desired learning outcomes. Curriculum teams in our district have worked hard over the past years to establish curricular pacing and common unit assessments. She wonders now if teams of teachers could brainstorm ways to layer units so that students can be more in charge of their own learning!

When asked about the positive aspects she sees in education, Leanne notes that it recognizes the *whole* person in every student. She works in a building with some of the most dedicated special education staff a community could hope for. It excites her when kids with special needs are learning in the regular education classroom right alongside their peers. Leanne values the professional time she has with others. She believes teachers should have several weeks of lead and team teaching so they can feel confident in a variety of subjects and real-life situations.

Amy Oakley, Director of Instruction notes, “Leanne embodies an incredible desire to learn and grow as a professional. Leanne models lifelong learning in her own quest to constantly improve her students’ achievement. She does this by reflecting on her own instructional practice – taking full responsibility of and keeping a strong respect for her own impact on the learning that takes place in her room.”

From Karen Tuten, a former colleague, “The success of the Barrie School Student Council, South Kettle Moraine Reading Council, and Mini-Grant Programs are a direct result of Leanne’s passionate involvement. Karen remembers humorously that in math lessons To remember the thousands and millions places, Leanne and the class would talk like Arnold Schwarzenegger, flex their muscles, and kiss their biceps before reading those “really beeg numbahs”. Leanne spends many late hours creating curricular enhancers that will make a lesson exciting and engaging for her students.”

From a parent, Leanne brings such a fun and creative style to her teaching. Our son showed tremendous growth that year, I begged Leanne to move along with him as he grew. She recognizes the needs of her students and doesn’t stop until she gets them the help they need.

It is with great pleasure that we recommend Leanne Bongers for the Herb Kohl Teacher Fellowship Award.