

Appreciative Inquiry Interview: Donna Hunt, VI Teacher, Sherwood Forest Elementary School

1. Tell me about a high point in your teaching career.
 - The moment when students make the connection between individual Braille dots and what they are actually reading, when they realize it's more than random letters
 - It's like a lightbulb going on, the child realizes they're reading a sentence
 - Sighted kids have the opportunity to sort of read without realizing it: recognizing things like the McDonald's arches or the grocery store sign, they know what it means, even if they can't actually read it
 - Blind kids don't have that chance, they just go place and are handed things and aren't able to see letters and words before fully knowing what they mean, so while a sighted child can gradually make the connections, blind ones aren't feeling Braille everywhere and always having chances to make those connections
 - So when they finally get it, finally can read on their own, it's a special moment

2. When was a time when you felt most effective?
 - The moment of realizing that every part of every day is a teaching opportunity
 - Started working as a classroom assistant, just told to be student's eyes and lead them around and help them out
 - Realized there is so much they don't understand or know because no one had taken the time to explain it to them
 - First student, Shareff, loved to swing on the playground, so she would put him on the swing and tell him how to pump his legs to get it going
 - One day he asked what holds the swing up, which made her realize that she can't take anything for granted, we know so much because we can see it and don't even realize it's something that a person wouldn't know
 - After that, she always took the time to explain everything in full detail

3. How has your teaching style improved over the years? I.e., what are specific improvements you've made?
 - Teaching blind students makes you think outside the box, have to give hands-on learning opportunities
 - Realize that parents don't think to teach their blind children basic life skills like teeth brushing, how to feed themselves, how to count money
 - So she teaches them that type of stuff, thinks of real life skills they'll need, and it's different for each grade level (she teaches K-5)
 - Have learned to fill in gaps in curriculum and what parents don't teach
 - Blind kids can feel peoples' faces, but don't see skin color or understand race or ethnicity, so she explains that, because it's something they will need to understand
 - An example of little things that are overlooked: parents will pour milk for their kid, but the kid doesn't know it comes from a carton in the fridge...all kids will make a mess, so why

not let the blind ones make a mess too, so they can learn how to take care of themselves?

-She even has started to teach them how to have a conversation- many of the parents have such low standards for their blind children that they don't teach them these basic things, and some of her students also have mental impairments, which makes their parent think they are even more helpless, so she has to go the extra mile to teach those kids to be more self-sufficient

-At end of every day, she tells each student what she is proud of, what they need to work on, (ex. "Tonight I want you to brush your teeth all by yourself!"), positive reinforcement because they need it