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Interview with Jacque Feist

Jan R. Unruh
Fort Hays State University

Jacque Fesit

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CHAPTER II: INTERVIEW WITH JACQUE FEIST, MASTER TEACHER

Jacquelyn Kaye Feist began her teaching career in 1988 at Unified School District 443 in Dodge City, Kansas at Dodge City High School. She began her teaching duties as an American Government and American History teacher, a role she held for two years. After just two years in that role, she was then given the assignment of social studies department chair head, although she was that department's youngest teacher. Along with being a department chair head, she continues her impact in the classroom as teacher of Advanced American Government, American Government Survey and World Cultures. Beyond this classroom contact with her students, she also serves as senior class sponsor and coaches basketball, track, and softball.

Jacque's parents instilled in her an early desire to acquire information and to be a meaningful part of the community in which they lived. Her parents modeled respect for teachers and were supportive of the local school system. Jacque's parents taught her that learning was her greatest opportunity for growth. They also modeled that being involved in the school and community was a positive and important part of life.

Jacque realized during her high school career that she had aspirations of becoming a teacher. She realized that for the first time teachers were directly related to student success and student learning. Teachers were no longer just sources of information, but role models, and individuals who genuinely cared about what happened to their students. Jacque has continued to promote and practice the great benefits that being a role model to students can have on the lives of those students.

As Jacque went towards her postsecondary studies she made the decision to work with high school students. Feeling this was a very critical period in a person's life, she saw the reward that could come from making an impact to a student at this level, and she believed that her success as a high school student could be used as a impetus for directing others toward that same goal. Another reason for choosing a secondary education degree

was the opportunity to focus on an area of interest. Jacque discovered a love of history and used that as her main area of focus towards her accreditation to become a teacher. While pursuing this line of learning, she also discovered that a history major is able to receive accreditation in large areas of the social sciences, which has been her career and a lifetime interest. Besides recognizing the great responsibility she had taken upon herself in making this career choice, Jacque's faith remained strong that she had made the correct decision.

Jacque continued this belief in remaining in the field of education when she recently completed her Master's Degree from Fort Hays State University in secondary school administration . She currently has no aspirations to pursue a career in administration, but she believes that acquiring this degree has helped her gain the knowledge to become a more effective teacher. This knowledge base has given her more insight into the decision making process of administrators and school boards in relation to decisions which affect both staff and students. She is also more actively involved with committees and organizations at her school which impact educational issues.

Jacque has many relevant and very worthy educational teaching practices which she uses to make life meaningful and current to her students. The impact of multiple intelligence's on education has been a model which Jacque has gained additional knowledge in and sees a relevance to its practice in her classroom. She has worked on developing a summer school program which utilizes the multiple intelligence model. The diversity of the Dodge City school system can benefit from implementation of the multiple intelligence theory as it is highly adaptable to meeting the needs of the non-traditional student. As a result of her research in this area, Jacque has dramatically altered the types of research projects she assigns her students by allowing them to see the relevance of what they are learning by applying it to real world situations which are consistent with their strengths.

Though Jacque says her teaching style is very traditional, she has been able to adapt with changes in the educational setting by meeting them head-on. She has taken her traditional method of questioning her students and made it more personal and real world relevant. She has taken the traditional and given it a twist to meet the needs of her students.

Another teaching method which Jacque has strong beliefs toward is integration of the curriculum. Integration of the curriculum shows a student the ability to use knowledge in more than one area. What you learn in one subject can be applied to another, and then the learning process shows a connectedness and a purpose to the student which may have been lacking before correlation of subjects was implemented.

In the field of secondary education, Jacque has recognized and met the challenge of teaming in the high school setting. Block scheduling in the Dodge City High School has made this a reality. Block scheduling has given teachers a planning period of a length that lets them be constructive and productive. Due to the specialization of secondary teachers in a subject area, the correlation of subject matter becomes more difficult. But this is a challenge that Jacque has met. The ability for this teaching concept to succeed lies in the teacher and their willingness to put in the time and extra work necessary to make any worthwhile program succeed. Block scheduling has also been an educational tool that Jacque feels has benefited the academic setting of the high school. Block scheduling makes it easier to work one-on-one with her students and has been a positive influence on both the teachers and students. Dropout rate and failure rate have lowered and Jacque credits this with more personal time with the students and the opportunity period at the end of the day which allows students to keep on track with their academic goals. Jacque states school moral is high and the positive aspects of block scheduling has outweighed the negative.

Jacque also utilizes lecturing as a significant part of her instructional model, but she approaches it in a different way than most might consider for a high school classroom.

She believes in putting her students in a circle and the purpose for this activity is to give her students the confidence to take a chance and spread their wings. While sitting in a circle, there is no division between the good student sitting in the front and the less capable or "bad" student sitting in the back. In a circle, all are equal sitting in the same direction. Jacque believes that reading aloud to her students is still an important part of their academic day, even though many would believe that her students have "outgrown" being read aloud to.

Another important teaching philosophy that Jacque employs is giving her students ownership in their learning process. When students believe that they have choices in their learning environment they are more willing to give their abilities an opportunity to grow and develop. Jacque attempts to use her students personal experiences to make the learning experience more relevant to them. When she sees an opportunity to use a student's personal experiences to address an educational topic and make it more relevant to the real world, she uses that opportunity to make the learning more meaningful to her students. This teaching model has also made her students more understanding of others situations in life and cultures and has given them more empathy towards other's difficulties.

Jacque takes a nonjudgemental stance with her students. She gets to know her students and becomes aware of their out of school lives and lets them know she is available to them outside of the school classroom. She continues to remain in contact with many of her previous students that have graduated and are continuing their own college education. Jacque also visits her own high school teachers when she is back home visiting because she has discovered that once she got out in the "real" world she realized that her teachers did know what they were talking about. Jacque's students know that she is going to treat them with the same respect that she expects from them. This makes Jacque more than a teacher to her students, it makes her a real person they can relate to.

Jacque has dealt with students who have faced various challenges outside of the school setting - challenges that have interfered with their classroom learning experiences. She has recognized that for some students, the time spent in school may be the best part of their day. As a result of this, Jacque has altered her teaching strategies so that all of her students have the opportunity to feel they have made some type of contribution to the class and have gained some valuable experience that they can take with them when they enter the real world. She tries to find hooks that will trigger their individual interests and that tie in with her assessments that she uses to evaluate the students' progress and success and her success as a teacher. She believes in celebrating her students' successes by making sure the success or good work is recognized. Jacque tries to be a "supervisor of learning" rather than a "dictator of learning".

Jacque believes that to be an effective educator today, teachers need to build a good rapport with their students. They need to establish a comfortable learning environment in which the student is aware of the teacher as a caring person. One of Jacque's techniques for this may seem unusual for a high school teacher, but Jacque stated that even high school students like to get stickers on their papers and be given a piece of candy after lunch. She states her students look upon these small rewards as actual evidence that their teacher is thinking about them. Teachers must be fair and honest in working with their students. Her students expect their teacher to have high expectations for them and they are willing to comply with her standards because they know she is sincere. Jacque continues to seek ways to improve on her teaching strategies and techniques to meet the needs of her ever changing student body and she does this in order for her students to enjoy success.

Jacque has another very unique aspect to her teaching abilities and that has been her bringing the timely subject of community service into the school setting. Her classroom has been referred to as a "clearing house for community service". Community service was not a new idea to Jacque. She related many childhood experiences with her

family which have strengthened her belief in the value and purpose of community service. Growing up in a small, rural community, Jacque saw first hand how a community can work together and the school is an important part of the community environment. Jacque's parents did not just say to her that she needed to be involved in the community but they set an example for her by themselves being involved in many community activities which became a way of life for Jacque and her family. While growing up, Jacque had the opportunity to work at Camp Aldrich and Camp Hope for juvenile cancer patients. This experience helped her to realize how significant and important she could be in the lives of those around her.

Jacque has been able to take her community and civic mindedness and apply it to the school setting. When the Dodge City school district received a grant from the Kansas Commission of National Community Service, Jacque, as department head of the social sciences, was given the responsibility of keeping track of community service hours completed by students and coordinating community service projects between the community and the schools. In this capacity, Jacque has also been involved in conducting inservices for other schools and organizations about the community service program established at Dodge City, as well as working with the issue of community service at the local, state and national levels. She spends a great amount of her time informing individuals about the program and the role that service learning plays in the overall educational program at Dodge City High School.

As Community Service Coordinator for the high school program, Jacque is responsible for making sure that every student who graduates from Dodge City High School completes their community service requirement. This requirement is set up through the social studies department and the community service hours are made a requirement of those classes to receive credit for the same to graduate. The number of hours required is based upon the level of coursework being taken by the student.

Jacque works with community leaders and various organizations that can utilize the help of the district's students. Several activities are set up on an annual basis, but many are the result of singular events requiring volunteer work, such as recycling projects, clean-ups and environmental projects. Jacque also sponsors a community service club at the high school called the Octagon Club. These students are responsible for a recycling program which has been set up for the entire school district through utilizing mobile recycling trailers at each building. This project has also resulted in increased neighborhood recycling.

Although this program was established under a grant from the state of Kansas, it is now self-supporting and Jacque believes that it has had a positive impact on the lives of a great number of the students and the community. The students desire to participate in community activities has been impressive and Dodge City High School won the Kansas Outstanding School Award in 1993 for their district wide community service program.

Jacque also applies her teaching philosophy of student ownership in the community service program. She encourages the students to take on the leadership roles of making the project management decisions. However, Jacque is just as much involved in the work end of the projects as her students. She believes that she is working with the people who are our future and for them to understand the needs of the larger community they will learn best by example and hands-on experience in real-life projects. Jacque believes that the most important characteristic her students can take with them when leaving her class is the feeling of self worth they have established about themselves, and the pride they feel about the service they have completed for their community.

Jacque's community service work is not limited to the local level. In 1994 Jacque was appointed to the Kansas Commission on National and Community Service by then Governor Joan Finney. In 1995, she was the only committee member to be reappointed to the commission by Governor Bill Graves. Jacque feels this appointment is one of her greatest accomplishments. She feels this helps her teaching by setting an example of civic

mindedness for her students and she spends a great amount of time with these activities. As a commission member, Jacque is involved in the legislative process at both the national and state level. Her responsibilities include reading all proposed grants which are then submitted to Washington, DC for consideration. The amount of money the state of Kansas receives from the national government is based upon the number of qualified grant applicants which are received. The distribution of this money to programs within the state of Kansas is then the commission's responsibility.

Due to this commission appointment, Jacque has developed a greater interest in governmental duties and does not deny that she may be interested in pursuing work in this area further. She is currently looking at doing an internship in Washington, DC next summer. But Jacque's desires to learn more about our governmental system are not selfish ones. She believes that her experiences so far have helped her to set examples for her students of how important it is to become involved in the governmental structure of your community and state. This is another way for her to bring real-world examples into the classroom for her students to make learning more realistic and meaningful.

Jacque has never let her multitude of endeavors get in the way of her teaching and helping her students learn more than what is in a textbook. One of her greatest rewards is when a student will tell her that they are glad she taught them something because they are actually using it. Jacque believes that the more positive feedback she receives from her students the better. It just reinforces what this researcher has come to know by conducting this interview; Jacque Feist truly exemplifies the qualities of a dedicated master teacher.