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AN INTERVIEW WITH BETTY AMOS  
KANSAS TEACHER OF THE YEAR 1984

DAVID P. STUEVE

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY  
SUMMER 1995

## CHAPTER 2: NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH BETTY AMOS

Betty Amos decided to be a teacher when she was in third grade because she had an exciting teacher who did many hands-on activities with her students. She remembered, for instance, studying pioneers because the class churned butter and then ate the butter on crackers. This teacher encouraged Amos to do well in school, and from then on, her goal was to become a teacher. In high school, Amos became interested in special education through a Luther League trip to Axtell, Nebraska. In 1966 when Amos graduated from high school, special education was a small field. She attended the University of Kansas in Lawrence to study special education because they offered Amos the most scholarship funding and a junior and senior traineeship through the state of Kansas. Later, Amos earned her masters in gifted education from Kansas State University and her certification in administration from Fort Hays State University. Amos claimed she has probably attended all of the Kansas regents' schools at some time or another to get additional certification or to update credentials throughout her career.

Both of her parents have always supported Amos in everything she wanted to do. She said they told her that she could do whatever she wanted. Her siblings were encouraged in the same way, and she now has a sister who who is the district attorney in Shawnee County, Kansas. Amos remembered her parents always being positive; they found the strengths in each of their children and encouraged them to "go for it." She and her siblings have learned to set and to reach goals and have continued to do so throughout their lives.

At the time Amos was nominated for Kansas Teacher of the Year, she was teaching second grade in Colby Public Schools. Dr. Doug Christiansen, who is now

the Commissioner of Education in Nebraska, was superintendent then. Dr. Christiansen and the elementary school principal, Kenny Rogers, decided to nominate Amos for Kansas Teacher of the Year. At that time the C.T.A., which is Colby Teachers' Association, had also nominated Amos. She was asked to write her philosophy of teaching in five or six sentences and to provide some background information about herself. Amos said she provided these criteria and then forgot about the nomination until Dr. Christiansen called her and said Warren Bell from the state department was in Colby and wanted to talk with her because he had something to tell her. Warren Bell made a point of going on site to name the Kansas Teacher of the Year. Amos said she was "very pregnant" at the time and that she remembered Bell saying they hadn't had a pregnant teacher of the year before. He wondered if she would be able to travel to Topeka to accept her award in November. Since her first child had come early, Amos told Bell that she would be able to make the trip because she was sure the child would be born by then. As it turned out, Amos accepted the award via telephone because she was in the hospital with her new-born daughter.

At that time, Amos still did not know too much about the Kansas Teacher of the Year award, but she was very honored that she had been nominated. One of the things that happened after she received the award was that she got to speak to the legislature at the capitol in Topeka. She did this in the spring of 1984, and she got to meet the other Kansas finalists. That year, she began giving workshops, speeches, and commencement addresses throughout the state of Kansas. Because she was nursing her infant daughter, she was provided with child care for the baby while she attended these functions. Amos had given workshops before this as a member of I.P.D. (Instructional Professional Development), a committee of the Kansas National Education Association. (This committee is now called Instructional Advocacy.) The award gave Amos the opportunity to give a variety of workshops across the state of

Kansas and in other states as well. Before receiving the award, Amos was not aware of the obligations connected to it. One of the big benefits was that in 1984, all the State Teachers of the Year were invited to Captiva Island in Florida for a symposium on excellence in education sponsored by Burger King. There Amos met all the big names in education and all the Teachers of the Year from across America. She had the opportunity to speak to many fantastic educators who were doing wonderful things in their classrooms. Amos said she grew professionally that year and was humbled to be included in such a fine group of educators. Because of her award, Amos became a member of the National State Teachers of the Year, an organization dedicated to professional growth. Amos still attends their yearly conference. She attended this conference in Chicago in June of 1995. She especially enjoys this organization because the members continue to encourage each other in their profession.

Amos said as Teacher of the Year, she considered herself a representative of teachers across Kansas who were excelling. She said a master teacher has to have a commitment to education and has to be committed to helping children learn--no matter what that takes. As an administrator, Amos has found there is not just one way to help children learn and to encourage children to continue learning. A master teacher does whatever it takes emphasized Amos. Studies of the Teachers of the Year, Amos said, have revealed no one unique characteristic about them. Instead, they are teachers who do unique or "off the wall" things. Amos said master teachers are willing to take risks to help kids learn, and they have a high level of energy and enthusiasm. Master teachers are knowledgeable about education and are on the forefront of reform and change because they will try new things to help children learn. Amos said they are also willing to share their knowledge with others.

According to Amos, administrators can help develop master teachers by supporting and nurturing them. An administrator who listens to a teacher's ideas and

reasons for changes and then supports the teacher by running the forefront with the Board of Education can help a master teacher to grow. An administrator who believes in such a teacher is a great asset to education. As an administrator, Amos said she sees her job as helping teachers become better and supporting them in whatever they are doing. Amos also said she thinks teachers should visit other classrooms more, both in their own schools and in other schools.

To encourage high quality people to enter the field of education, Amos said that educators could promote future teachers through organizations which offer scholarships to those entering the field. These groups often look not for "A" students but for those who have already demonstrated some initiative for developing programs where they saw a need. For example, Amos shared that a recent winner of a scholarship from the National State Teachers of the Year was a young woman from a broken home who was already doing counseling with children from broken homes through her church. Amos suggested at the middle school and high school levels teachers who are good model teachers can encourage those with an interest in teaching. These teachers can also support and nurture students who demonstrate an interest in or an aptitude for teaching. The Student National Education Association and Future Teachers Associations are also groups that can help to encourage young people to enter the field of education.

In Kansas, a program which was developed but never received funding was the Kansas Internship Program. This program was designed to put master teachers in the classroom with new teachers. These two were to work together, and the master teacher was to help train and support the new teacher. Amos said she would not be teaching today if it had not been for a teacher in Grand Island, Nebraska who was a special education teacher in the room next to hers. According to Amos, this woman was a master teacher who "picked up the pieces" every day of Amos's first year

teaching. According to Amos, teachers need to do more of this type of mentoring. She noted that Salina, Kansas has a very good beginning teacher program which allows the new and first year teachers to get together and talk with master teachers about some problems they have encountered. Amos said that master teachers or veteran teachers need to be sensitive to the new teachers in their buildings and to be there for them.

Amos believes that professional development, or good inservices, is the answer to continuing education. Amos said she is glad that professional development councils are allowing inservice points. Many service centers like ESSDACK (Educational Service and Staff Development Association of Central Kansas) provide the professional development workshops for schools in their areas. Amos said that her education from 1966 to 1970 did not prepare her for the challenges she meets in education today. She would not have been able to meet those challenges without the benefits she received from inservices. For example, she said in 1970, schools didn't even have computers in classrooms. She had to learn about computer technology in the classroom through inservice training. Amos said inservice is important when it is good inservice. She said a good workshop should provide follow-up instead of an expert coming in, giving an inservice, and then leaving.

In Marquette, Kansas, where she is a principal, most of their inservice is provided by the service center in Hutchinson, Kansas, but they have also had some speakers come to their school, such as Larry Lazotte. They assess their inservices through the traditional professional development paperwork, through evaluation, and through discussion in faculty meetings. She said many of the ideas for things they are implementing in their buildings came from inservice and staff discussions which followed them. Her staff decided how they would evaluate their use of that information. Amos said in Marquette the staff is very satisfied with the inservice training they

receive. However, she said that she couldn't say that for every place where she has taught. She said they are lucky to have had some of the gurus in education come to their district and have also had follow-up and study teams develop as a result of those visits.

Amos believes it is very important for teachers to belong to professional organizations. She said in order to be a professional, one needs to belong to professional organizations. She has believed that since she was a student Kansas National Education Association member. She said that she is still a life member of the Kansas National Education Association, and she is a member of United School Administrators and the Association for School Curriculum and Development. She said the reading material such as Kappan and Educational Leadership provided by these associations is excellent. Although she doesn't read each magazine from cover to cover, she saves issues and then refers back to them when necessary. Amos said she also thinks going to conferences offered by these professional groups is beneficial because one can talk with others about what is going on in education. Amos became involved with giving workshops through her membership in the Kansas National Education Association and that she was trained by fantastic trainers through this program.

Amos described her personal teaching style as "personal." She said she believes in getting to know the children and in getting them to be motivated and excited about the subject area. She believes in doing creative things that are relevant to what students are studying. She stated that when she was an elementary school teacher, she believed in taking students on field trips often and in getting them out of the classroom to see what was happening and then relating it to what they were learning in class. After a field trip, students wrote thank you notes and stories about the field trip experience. She said she believed in integration before it was a word. In



Colby she and some other teachers developed a curriculum that integrated science, social studies and art. If their students were discussing the Indians on the time line, they were also taught about Native American sand paintings and other artwork. Integration showed the kids how it all fit together. Amos said she believes that a teacher has to meet the needs of the child first, and that her teaching style focuses on the individual student and makes him or her excited about learning.

Amos's teaching style has evolved through what has happened in education. She said when she first went out to teach, she really didn't know much about curriculum and how to build it. She learned a lot about how children learn and what they need to gain knowledge in her first years teaching special education. At that time, there weren't many materials available for purchase, so she created a lot of her own materials. When Nation at Risk came along, she and other teachers started working on curriculum and objectives. They became very focused on *what* children should learn and *that* they would learn it. Through this Amos said she became very curriculum focused. Amos said she liked to teach as a creative teacher who could decide how her students would best learn a given item in the curriculum. Through her special education background, Amos learned that one student may learn something one way while another student may learn in an entirely different way. She learned to fit a student's learning style to the method of instruction.

Amos said technology has also changed her style of teaching. As an example, she talked about computers in the classroom and how her students now can use spell-check, spreadsheets, and even can do their research papers on the computer. According to Amos, technology has changed her life as an administrator and as a teacher. She said she can not function a day without her Powerbook or her computer, and she said children are going out into a world in which technology is a big part.

When she described her classroom environment, Amos described her science

classroom as a "hands-on oriented" room. Her students worked with hands-on materials almost on a daily basis. Amos said she did not lecture because she believed her students had to be involved in what they were learning. She used a lot of randomly picked study groups which she called "study teams." Even though they had study teams, Amos said she also required individual accountability; she said her students had to know the knowledge themselves and also had to be able to relate it and share it with the others in their group. Amos described her classroom environment as "immersed, action-oriented, and hands-on." Amos believes she has always been the kind of teacher who knew what her children needed to learn and then found a way for them to learn it.

Amos said she believes in consistency of rules and class management in her classroom. She does not believe in a haphazard class. She said that students need to know up front what the teacher expects of them and what are the disciplinary consequences of breaking rules. Even in her kindergarten classroom, Amos let the students help her make decisions regarding rules and consequences. She said a teacher has to be a good class manager to do the creative kinds of activities she did in her classroom.

Amos's students knew up front what her expectations were because they were a part of the process of creating those classroom rules. She said a teacher has to respect students also. Consequences in her classroom were handled individually, but they were always implemented. As an administrator, Amos finds it the same way. She meets with the students on the first day of school when she tells them what she expects of them and what will happen if they fail to meet these expectations. Amos noted that not everyone may get the same consequences since they may not have broken the rules in the same ways. She thinks parents should be involved in nearly all of the consequences, and she said she involves the parents of her students in them.

Parents also need to know up front what the teacher's expectations will be and what the consequences will be if the student does not meet those expectations. Amos noted that she has found more and more that students want that consistency and structure, and students want to know that teachers have expectations of them.

As a teacher, Amos was very involved in developing curriculum in her school, especially in Colby. There, she worked on curriculum committees that came from the teachers. The teachers there at all levels developed the curriculum through summer work. Amos said she is now working with her teachers in Marquette on developing curriculum. She said this is a slow process which can not be done overnight and requires more than "after school time." Amos said as a teacher she could have been as involved as she wanted to be in developing curriculum, and she wanted to be very involved. She thinks it is essential that the staff have an interest in developing the curriculum. Development of curriculum should come from the teachers because they are the ones who work with those children daily and they are the ones who have expertise in curriculum, especially those teachers who have taught for a long time and have seen the evolving curriculum. If teachers are keeping up with what is happening in society and in education, then they are the ones who know what is going on; they are the ones who see the kids daily and know how kids learn and how they are best learning, so they are the ones who should develop curriculum, not the administrators.

Amos currently lives in the small community of Marquette, Kansas. She said that she feels the community should be really involved in education--not that community members dictate what the educators do, but that their input is important. She pointed out that the community provides the children that educators teach. She also added that the business community can help in other aspects of education. Schools, according to Amos, should be living communities. She said that she does not think parents should select textbooks or tell educators what they should or should

not be doing in the classroom because teachers have the expertise in that area. However, she further noted that the input of parents is important because their children are the students we are educating. Parents, the communities, and educators have to be partners; we won't make any progress if we don't work together. Amos noted that as an administrator she has parent problems, but she still feels that her school has yet to involve parents more in the education process; she thought they should be involved in more committees such as the site councils. She said recently they invited community members to help with a committee which evaluated eligibility for middle school students. Amos said the community certainly needs to be involved when the district is working on bond issues also; otherwise the bond issue won't go.

In regards to local school boards, Amos said they need to be informed because they have so many facets of the district to be concerned with such as facilities, discipline and coaching. Then, the board needs to let those in charge of particular areas, whether that be an administrator in charge of a building or a teacher in charge of a classroom, do what they think is best and be supportive of what those professionals are doing. The key is to be aware of what is going on in the different areas. Amos said that she realizes this is a difficult job especially since board members are elected officials and not paid employees of the district. She said that she does not believe that board members ought to evaluate teachers; instead, they should let the administrators do that since that is the administrator's job. The board of education needs to be aware about what is going on from communicating with the administrators. Then they should allow the administrators to work with the teachers. She said communication is the basis of it all as well as working as a team with the teachers, administrators, community and parents. Amos warned against getting into an adversarial role with the board, even though that can happen with negotiations.

Amos said that she was lucky in moving from teacher to administrator because

after she moved to Marquette, she not only worked as the principal, but she also taught science for two years. She refers to these years as "transitional years." Evaluation of teachers and working with marginal teachers to help them grow were two areas in which she had never worked. Discipline of the entire building was also a big difference for her in moving into the role of administrator. One of the hardest things Amos said that she has dealt with is seeing her entire school as a microcosm of society and seeing what is happening with families and with society as a whole. She is troubled by the child abuse and broken homes she has seen. She said because of this, she does a lot of counseling of both parents and students which she did not know she would be doing as an administrator. In the area of finances, being in charge of the budget for the entire building and the paperwork that goes along with that was another change she had to deal with in her role as a principal. Tied to that is the responsibility of taking care of an entire facility or plant--the football field, bathroom, educators, custodians, cooks, lunchroom supervisors and teachers' aides --she is responsible for all of them. Developing all the programs which go on at the school level is a further responsibility of a principal which Amos said has been exciting. She said this is why she went into administration. She knew what was happening on the classroom level, and she wanted to know if it could be done on a building level.

Amos claimed that much of her time as a principal is spent dealing with discipline. She said that her superintendent told her that she may think she has seen it all and another new problem will walk into her office. She estimated ninety percent of what walks into her office are problems, but she also said she daily sees herself in the role of problem solver. She has developed as a problem solver and as a change agent since moving from teaching into administration. She added to these the roles of liaison, communicator, and public relations person. She said she did those things in the classroom but on a different level.

One lesson Amos learned in the classroom that carried over to her role as a principal was relating to people. She thinks it is important to relate to people and to have involvement of parents. She said she always felt that this was important on the classroom level, and she feels it is even more so on the building level. She added that she would even bring in the community also. Developing curriculum and programs in her classroom also helps her in her role as principal. She now does it on the building level.

What Amos misses most about teaching is the daily contact with students, what she called the "everyday seeing them turn on to learning." As a principal, she doesn't see the children everyday or at the same time every day, and she misses that. She misses finding out if something has happened in a child's life. When she had daily contact with students, she developed a rapport and a respect with them. She said she doesn't get to do that as often now, even though she tries to be very visible and to spend time with students.

The most rewarding thing about being a principal Amos said is that now on the building level she can do things that she once could do only on the classroom level. She helps, supports, and nurtures her teachers also because she said how she treats her teachers is how she would like them to treat their students. She feels if she is good, nurturing, and positively reinforcing to her staff, they will be that way to their students. Amos said that now she can have an effect on a lot more students this way. She explained that she feels she can have an effect on students through her individual contact with them, through programs that she implements in her building, and through her effect on their teachers.

In dealing with teachers who need to improve, Amos said it is difficult to show the teacher how to grow without devastating that person's ego. She said she needs to make sure her teachers are doing what they need to do, but she cannot be abrasive to

them. She said that there are some things that she can say absolutely cannot be done in her school. She has told her teachers if they are doing anything in the classroom that she can't walk in on or a parent can't walk in on, then they should not be doing it. Amos said she feels whatever is being done in the classroom should be what is best for kids. Her job is to be sure that is going on all the time. She does "float in and out of classrooms" so that she is aware of what is going on.

Amos said that there are some things that she has to say "No" to. As an example, she said if she had a teacher who was abusive to children, she would know that she has to stop that behavior now, no matter what it took. She further noted that this has never happened. Otherwise, she said when she evaluates and observes a teacher, she tries to make observations which will help the teacher improve instruction. She also tries to find strong points to praise. She gives teachers tips that she may have learned or reading material or she may have the teacher observe another who does a good job in a particular area. She noted that she is still learning about this aspect of her job and added that the hardest part of this is working with marginal teachers. She wants them to be good, but she can't change them. They have to change themselves. She said that she can be there to support them when they change and to try to make all the other things work so that the change is possible because some habits don't break easily.

Developing trust with a staff, Amos noted, is an aspect that takes time. Communication, relationship, and support are important to developing this trust. She said that as an administrator she would have to work with individual teachers and see what each is doing in the classroom. She said she would talk with the teachers about education as well as about their personal lives. She would have to develop rapport first. She said that trust and honesty have to be there in that type of relationship because people know if honesty is present in a relationship. If the trust is not there,

Amos said, it is a tough thing to rebuild. In Marquette, Amos said she was fortunate because the teachers were very trustworthy with her from the beginning, and they respected her from the beginning. This does not mean, she emphasized, that they all agree with everything she says or does, but they know that she will do the best possible things for kids. Her focus is on how kids can best learn and how to develop the climate and environment so those teachers can best teach. Amos said she works hard and has always worked hard as a teacher and as an administrator. Her teachers need to know that she is working hard for them, for the school, and for the community. She said that if they all work hard, then they will succeed and progress. Then they need to celebrate those successes. She said rebuilding trust can be done if there is a lot of communication.

In regards to the evaluation process of teachers, Amos said that her school has a good evaluation process. Teachers and administrators developed a list of the characteristics of effective teachers, some of which include: being organized, being enthusiastic, and monitoring student learning. Teacher evaluations are guided by these characteristics. For a tenured teacher, the administrator has to be in the classroom at least four times for a minimum of one class period. The administrator schedules the first three visits and provides the teacher with a feedback form after each visit. On the fourth visit, the teacher invites the administrator to the classroom and is provided with a formal evaluation after this visit. After this evaluation, the teacher has the opportunity to respond. Then the teacher and administrator develop goals together and later evaluate those goals. Amos said she likes this process better than the teacher just writing up some goals and handing them in because the administrator and the teacher develop together what they need to work on. For new teachers, the administrators must be in the classroom eight times a year. Three visits each semester are informal evaluations; these are then followed by a formal



students for the work force. Schools need to stay ahead of the futuristic trends and what jobs will be out there for our students so we can prepare them for those jobs. At the same time, Amos said skills like cooperative learning, relating to others, and communicating are still going to be important. She said we will really have to develop work ethics in our students because they appear to have been lost for awhile.

Amos said we need to be even more technologically up-to-date as educators. At the same time, she said we cannot by-pass the basic skills which are the foundation for the rest of learning. Beyond the basic skills, Amos said everything that students learn should be relevant to what is happening on the outside. We have to prepare students to be ready to relate to other human beings, and to be technologically ready to enter the work force. Students must be able to meet the expectations of the future work force.

School improvement needs to continue into the future, Amos said. We need to continue changing and implementing programs that will change, whether it is multi-age programs or block scheduling. She said that she thinks the direction of education for the future will be continued school improvement and continued school change, and those changes could be using technology to evolve our curriculum into a relevant curriculum. We will have to develop means of accessing information she concluded.

In regards to Quality Performance Accreditation, Amos said that she thinks student outcomes and process outcomes are great; they are what we as educators should be doing. She said she doesn't care what it is called as long as we are looking at what is happening, looking at how our students learn, and helping them to be ready for the jobs out there and to be good citizens and leaders who are able to do all the things they need to do in the work force. Schools should be relevant learning places. Amos said there were times at her school in Marquette when they had kindergartners in the computer room practicing basic keyboard skills, along with

middle schoolers doing word processing and adults from the community who were taking evening computer courses. She thought it was wonderful that kindergarten students could see the adults who were life-long learners taking computers courses. We as educators need to model being life-long learners for students who will have to be life-long learners.

Amos concluded by saying that she is humbled by being chosen as Teacher of the Year. She said she has had wonderful opportunities in her twenty-five years in education. She has had down times too, but other days she is glad this is her chosen field. She loves what she has seen in education as far as teachers continuing to want to improve to meet the needs of children. She said she thinks children have lots of need now, and we as teachers need to really concentrate on the children and how we can best help them learn. She added we are now having to meet the needs of students who are included through inclusion also--and many times those are extreme needs. She said the more we concentrate on the child and how the student best learns, that is how we can improve education. We should use what the experts have learned and try to fit that into what we are doing with the kids we have.