

*EDU 430*

*Professional Development Paper*

*By*

*Elsa Leoncini*

During student teaching, I was placed in a district that had a predominant number of middle and upper-middle class students. The district is rather wealthy, and this reflects on the school on both a social and material way. The building is well kept and we have access to new technologies. The students are overall well-behaved, and most of them have a good work-ethic. There isn't a lot of diversity, and there isn't any much violence among the student body. This district has offers a decent salary compared to other schools in the area, and is attractive because of the social dynamics. In fact, the students are well-behaved and are usually rather strong academically. The parents are very involved in the school and the community, and tend to keep a close eye on their children's grades. There is a lot of support coming from the parents, as well as a very helpful staff. This district would be the kind of district that I may want to work in. However, the lack of diversity is a deterring factor. Also, Iowa and the Midwest in general have a culture that is not varied enough for me. I would like to go teach in areas that are more open to the rest of the world. I would like to teach to students who know what a chai tea is, or a miso soup. I would like to teach to students who are curious and aware of different cultures around the world. And most important of all, I would like to live in a cosmopolitan environment, where there is a rich cultural diversity and a wide selection of things to see and do (i.e.: museums, concerts, plays, etc).

I have been looking at the East coast, and I would really like to teach around the New York area. I do not want to live in the city, but I would like to live close enough so that I could have access to what the city has to offer. In addition to this, the East coast

seems to offer better salaries than Iowa. I hate to say this but, salary is an important factor in the decision process that I will follow.

I might try other states, and other areas, but one thing is for sure, I will never go to Texas. I have two friends who went to teach in Texas and are horribly disappointed, education is not valued enough there, and I refuse to work in the conditions that they are in right now.

As far as unions go, I will definitely be part of one or more. To me there is no hesitation. This may be because in France we have a strong social system and we are very attached to the respect of workers' rights. I found out that If you want to be part of the NEA in Iowa you also have to subscribe to the sub-branches of this union, which are IWLA (at the state level) and LMEA (at the district level). According to teachers here, this cost about \$600/year. Since it is tax deductible, I will surely pay into it.

Most fo these Unions have newsletters and journals that include articles written by other teachers and linguists. The Iowa World Language Association issues a newsletter that is a good source of information and research articles. The American Association of Teachers of French issues a monthly review (*The French Review*) that includes a large number of research articles. Most of them deal with classroom management, social and cultural input that would be useful in a French classroom, and French literature. I found this review very useful and thorough, I read a couple of articles and it is definitely something that I will subscribe to. The American Counsel on the Teaching of Foreign Languages has a newsletter that we can subscribe to: *The Language Educator*. It is also on the internet. This review includes activities, conference notices, etc. Their website is also a very good source of activities, and it also shows job openings

In order to see what other positions a school has to offer, I went and talked with three different people. According to me, each of them holds a position that is very important for the school and the students.

The first interview was conducted with Greg McCain, a special education teacher. A couple of years ago, Greg was a construction worker. He said that he had always wanted to be a teacher, but had found the salary too modest for the kind of life that he wanted to live. Finally, he decided to go back to school and get a teaching degree. He has been working at Linn-Mar for the past two years, and says he absolutely loves his job. He does not see himself changing career in the future, "this is it" he said. Since No Child Left Behind has pushed a lot more money towards special education, I asked him to gauge the pressure level that this law had had on him and the students. He said that even though they are getting more funds and help, the law has put a lot of pressure on the students. While before, not all students who needed help received it, now the students who feel too pressured drop out. Greg said that there have been both positive and negative outcomes to NCLB. I also asked him if he thought that there was an overload of misdiagnosis, and he said yes. Indeed, he said "some students are just lazy, and there is nothing a special Ed teacher can do for these students. On the other hand, some students who would have been labeled as lazy and actually have a learning disability, now have more chances to be diagnosed and receive the adequate help." I found this very interesting, and I feel like being a special education teacher would be a very rewarding profession, because when a student makes a progress, you know that it was no easy battle. I also asked Greg about days where he would feel very frustrated. He said that the most frustrating part of the job

is when you realize that “you can’t save everyone.” When a student drops-out, he said, you feel like you have failed.

I’ve always been intrigued by special education, since in France children with disabilities are often institutionalized, since there is a separation between regular students and students with disabilities. I found the idea of Least Restrictive Environment extremely clever and beneficial for all types of students. I could see myself as a special education teacher, it is a challenge that I would definitely be excited to take on.

The second person that I interviewed was Nancy Kleitsch, the school nurse. I was really curious about what this job entails, since a lot of students go to the nurse because they don’t feel comfortable in class or for a lot of reasons that don’t really have to do with them being physically sick. Nancy used to be a hospital nurse, and started at Linn-Mar 5 years ago. She loves it here and enjoys having a schedule similar to that of her kids. We discussed the responsibilities of the job, and the type of daily occurrences that she faces.

I don’t see myself being a nurse, but I really admire the job done by school nurses, and I was curious to know all that the job entails. In high school especially, students go through a lot of emotional changes, and the nurse is definitely on the first line when it comes to listening and guiding the students.

The third person that I interviewed was Danae Zigtema, a counselor. Like Greg McCain, Danae was not a teacher at first. She got a BA in journalism, but was never able to get a job in that field because her husband decided to move in a very small town. She then decided to go back to school and get a MAT. She started as a teacher but soon became a counselor at Kirkwood. She came to Linn-Mar 4 years ago, and loves her job

here. She doesn't see herself going through another career change. I asked her what the job entailed. In my mind, a counselor would be a person who would give any kind of advice to students, not just advice that pertained to academic work. However, the job of a high school counselor is "over 80% of working on the students' schedule and credits." However, Denae does not mind, she enjoys dealing with credits and schedules.

I don't see myself being a counselor either, but I feel like counselors have a key position in the school. They are the ones who help students preparing for their future, and they are also the ones who will talk to students who are having problems.

Overall, I was really happy to find out that all of these people were extremely pleased with their job, and I was also glad to know that they did not really have "a calling" for teaching right away. Even though I want to be a teacher, I don't feel this kind of "calling" so often mentioned in books that we had to read in methods classes.

I have researched a couple of graduate degrees, because I intend on getting a Masters, and also a Ph.D. If it weren't for financial reasons, I would keep going to school for ever. I really like learning, and I love college. I know that graduate school would certainly not be as fun as college, but it would be just as enriching.

The master degrees that I am most interested in at the moment are Spanish, and TESOL. I already know Spanish, and I would like to perfect it in order to maybe get a job at a bilingual school. I have had an interest for foreign languages ever since I had my first class of English, and I would love to pursue this and perfect my Spanish. If I could, I would also learn Russian, Italian, and Arabic. Maybe I should just be a linguist!

The TESOL master is offered in a large number of universities across the US, including the University of Northern Iowa, which is known to be an excellent school for

Education. TESOL stand for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. This would also help me get a job in a bilingual school. I would either want to teach in a bilingual school, or teach both French and ESL or ELL. I really feel like mastering the language of the country you are in is a key to reducing the cultural gap and understanding the world around you. I feel like language is a primary cultural barrier, and I would love to help students overcome the task of linguistic and cultural integration. When I came to the United States, I was proficient in English but it still took me a very long time to understand and adapt to some of the cultural aspects of this new environment. I believe that I have a unique perspective on north-American culture, and I think that it would be good if I could bring it to a classroom.

These are not the only Master Degrees I am contemplating, and more of them will probably add to the list. As of right now, I do not feel confident about teaching for a lifetime. I don't think that it would be possible for me to keep the same job until I retire. I get bored easily, and I have been around a lot of "burnt-out" teachers. I will get out of the profession before I get burned-out, because being a teacher like this is beneficial to neither students nor to the teacher him/herself.

I still don't know what I would like to do next. I've always liked to travel, and I would probably enjoy working in the tourism industry. I could also see myself working with children in other settings such as summer camps. Overall, I feel like my next career would have to involve an intellectual growth. I really hope to be able to keep on learning as I teach, because I could not stand to stay in an intellectual stand-by. This is one of the things that worry me the most about being a high school teacher.