

StoryCorps #3: September 2021

SIM: Why We're Still in Education

Audio file - [SIM StoryCorps 3 Sept 2021.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00 - Jocelyn Washburn

SIM Story Corps is a candid conversation between two educators about what's really important in the field of education, students, connections, hope, success. How did SIM contribute to attaining what matters most?

Listen to these stories of the educator's heart to find out. Then we invite you to find a partner. And tell your story.

In this SIM story corps, we'll hear Roseanne Arvin, a SIM professional development leader in Florida and Bev Colombo, a SIM professional development leader in Missouri, share why SIM kept them in the field of education.

00:00:38 - Bev Colombo

Hi Rosanne, I know you've been involved with SIM a really long time as I have, and I was just wondering how you got started and why you're still continuing to this day.

00:00:50 - Rosanne Arvin

That was good to talk to you. Well, my story is what kept me actually in education. So, I started out my career in 1980 and I was working with special education students at the K-5 level and at that time those students came to a resource classroom for reading and math and at the end of five years, a colleague said to me, "let's go to the high school" and I thought, hmm. Well, at that time if you were a special education teacher, you could teach anything, any content area, you did not have to have any additional certifications, those students just came to you for that coursework.

So, we moved to the high school. We both got at the same school, and I was assigned to teach English 1 and after about a year and half into it, I was really questioning whether to stay in the field of education period. I did not feel like I was doing any good for those students. It was very frustrating.

They were in no better shape than the 5th graders that I had just left. I didn't have good tools to use with them, and a flyer came, and that flyer was for the *Proficiency in Sentence Writing Strategy*. So, I went and was amazed by what I saw.

But being a smart Alec, when I went back to my classroom with students, I did not follow that instructional sequence like I should have. I skipped around, and I really did not get the results they told me I was gonna get. So, I went in one day and I apologized to my class and said, "If you will continue to play with me, I am going to do my best to implement this the way they told me to and see if it makes a difference."

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00:02:39 Rosanne Arvin

A turning point in my career, it kept me in education. So much so that I just retired last year after 40 years having spent 40 years with special education students. There were such profound successes with the Strategic Instruction Model that I'd just simply never turned around.

So, I'm wondering, Bev, we don't get a chance to talk very much and so I don't really know much background, what's your story?

00:03:09 Bev Colombo

Well, actually it's very similar.

I started out a little bit differently. I live in St. Louis, MO, so I've been a teacher in Missouri most of my career moved around a lot. I was one of the, I guess you know, really, the original SIM people, so I you know, started teaching a few years before you in like 1976 and but my background is a little different.

I had a background in psychology, and I worked in psychiatric hospitals, so I wasn't actually in education for quite a few years at the beginning and then my master's degree is actually in Ed.B.D. is on emotional disturbances and I worked, like I said, in a psychiatric hospital so I didn't really have much background in instruction, and they just threw me in.

My first job was as a consultant for secondary schools and just to give a little background, historical background on this, there were no services for students after 6th grade at that time, so I was in the first group of people that was going to begin services for secondary students. And you know, I had not even taught in the classroom yet, but I was going to be a consultant, great idea <said sarcastically>.

Rosanne Arvin:

What a challenge!

00:04:17 Bev Colombo

Yeah, exactly.

And so, I was assigned to a middle school, a high school, and an alternative school. So, I had 100 kids on my caseload, and it was responsible for all of the testing, all the evaluations and reevaluations, the IEPs (Individual Education Program), and on and on. And, you know, and I was supposed to actually sort of do something with the students to help them also.

So, because there really was nothing for secondary students at that time. I essentially tutored them as much as I could and tried to help them out when their classes tried to get them to pass their courses, things like that. But with 100 kids, that was really pretty hard, and I was really frustrated because I felt like here, I've just completed a master's degree and I really debated what I wanted to do with my psychology degree to be a psychologist, be a social worker, and I chose education because I thought I

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could really help students. But, like you, I felt like I wasn't really doing much for secondary students at all.

So, by the end of my first year, I was already wondering if I should continue teaching. So even earlier than you were wondering that, and fortunately my supervisor asked me if I wanted to go to a CEC conference in Atlanta, and I thought, well, why not, they're paying for it. Maybe I'll learn something there.

And so, I picked a breakout session on secondary research, since that's what I was doing and the presenter was this guy named Don Deshler from the University of Kansas and he presented this new theory about strictly secondary students explaining their research on these students at KU that they were conducting research on why these kids struggled so much and that they felt that many of the students were strategy deficient and at that time they had this red book of strategies that they had created and they were researching those and so this kind of made sense to me. At least it was something that, you know, that was different.

And so, I asked if I could have the red book. So, the next year I had that little red book. And I tried some of the strategies in the red book, but it didn't work very well because I didn't know about effective instruction. And so, you know, I didn't have the instructional background. You said you varied from it, you kind of went and just did what you know you wanted to. I didn't even have anything to follow actually.

00:06:26 Rosanne Arvin

Right

00:06:28 Bev Colombo

So finally, long story short, a couple of years later we finally got to be involved in a pilot of teachers in our district that were going to learn the Strategies and implement them. So, my first strategy is for paraphrasing and proficiency and sentence writing, just like you. I have I have a background in English, I have a minor in English and certificate for English too, so at least I had enough background to know that this proficiency in sentence writing was very good. And I followed it exactly. I implemented with great fidelity and our kids did really well.

I struggled a little bit more with paraphrasing, just because you had to listen to all these audio tapes, and you know it was, you know, now we have *Fundamentals in Summarizing and Paraphrasing*, you have all those prerequisite skills, but my kids needed a lot of those prerequisite skills, and then every year we got a couple more strategies so.

My story is so similar to yours in the sense that actually about my second or third year of teaching I went to broadcast school to go into broadcast journalism because I thought that this teaching thing is not working out for me. I'm not going to spend the rest of my career tutoring kids. So, like really, I always say that SIM is the reason I'm still in education.

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00:07:44 Bev Colombo

And I am not retired yet. I failed retirement twice now, so I'm still promoting SIM like every day. There's not a day that goes by that I don't say KU or SIM during the day.

00:07:55 Rosanne Arvin

Me too, my first introduction to Don Deshler was also at the CEC conference.

00:08:01 Bev Colombo

I should say it's a good thing he went to all those CEC (Council for Exceptional Children) conferences because I don't know where a lot of us probably wouldn't be here anymore if it weren't for that.

00:08:10 Rosanne Arvin

At least we have those stories. Those kids who said thank you, those parents who said thank you, yeah.

Well, it was great talking to you. I really appreciate it.

00:08:22 Bev Colombo

Yeah, it's so, so fun to hear how parallel our stories are.