SCHOOLS

Cassingham teacher tapped for panel

By DAVID S. OWEN
Bexley News Reporter

Amy Oswalt, a special education teacher at Cassingham Elementary School, has been chosen to serve as one of the panelists at the 35th annual New Ways of Approaching Variations sociolinguistics conference hosted by Ohio State University.

The conference, to be held Nov. 8-12 at the Hyatt on Capitol Square, will feature workshops, panels and discussions on the topics "Interfaces with Public Schools: Ethnolinguistic Diversity and Literacy Education" and "Varieties of English and Literacy Education."

The conference focuses on linguistic-oriented subjects such as conversation analysis, language contact, language and gender, regional variations in speaking and ethnography of speaking.

The panel Oswalt will be participating in will be held Nov. 11 and covers the "Varieties of English and Literacy Education" topic.

Oswalt, who holds a bachelor's degree from the Ohio State University in linguistics, said she still keeps in contact with the linguistics department.

"There are two panels, or topics, in this year's conference and the purpose is basically like a linguistics outreach program for teachers to show what linguistics can offer and help them with the whole literacy angle," she said.

"The main goal of this year's project is to bring sociolinguistic knowledge to bear on literacy education for a range of populations," she said.

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>
> **–Amy Oswalt**
> special education teacher

"Panelists will discuss issues that are based on sociolinguistic, linguistic knowledge and perspectives, but that speak to teachers."

Oswalt taught in the Columbus Public Schools for four years, and this fall marks the beginning of her second year with the Bexley City Schools.

Oswalt said that as an educator of students who have special instructional needs, she wants to ensure she is providing them with the best education possible.

Students are identified as requiring special education services through a team process, which includes a general classroom teacher, a special classroom teacher, a school psychologist and counselor, parents and a variety of other staff as needed, such as speech and language pathologists or occupational therapists.

"The team, based on tests, observations, and previously tried intervention strategies, determines if a student will qualify for special education services," she said.

"I do not believe any one cultural group is more likely to need special education services than another," she said. "But I do believe, more and more, it takes a special level of cultural sensitivity to ensure that I am providing an education that meets the needs of a wide variety of learners."

She said the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guides this process and encourages schools to begin using a process that determines if a student responds to a scientific research-based intervention as part of the evaluation procedures, to determine which students may have a specific learning disability and need special education services.

"My role in educating children is that I want to help teachers understand the difference between a true learning disability, such as dyslexia, and dialectical components that adversely impact a child's education, specifically in the area of reading," she said.

Marcia Farr, who helping to put the conference together this year, has asked each member of the panel to write a chapter for a book that will be published as a result of the conference.

"The purpose of the book is for literacy education to help teachers become better literacy educators," Oswalt said.

"If you understand the rules behind the language, it makes it easier for someone to teach it, and easier to correct students, and understand why some of them make mistakes."



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