Joffrey Craven Nov 6 2015

Cy-Ridge H.S.

C: Ok, it is November 6th 2015. I am at Cy-Ridge High School in Houston, Texas with Joffrey Craven and I was here last in January of 2008. Joffrey is in the same classroom teaching the same subjects.

J: Same subjects.

C: Last time you were married but you didn’t have any kids?

J: I wasn’t even married last time.

C: That’s right. You weren’t even married last time. Ok. So now he’s married and has two kids and I guess we can go ahead and start. First question has two parts: How do you define success in teaching and do you believe that Grand Valley State prepared you for success in the classroom?

J: Success in teaching can be difficult. I want to say grades and I have AP—you want to look at AP scores, but sometimes it is even the basic relationships it seems, like I had a kid who came back who I thought was going to be dead in two years and now he’s a fireman. So, one, the academic thing and what impact you can make on somebody’s personal life. If it is their decision to be more motivated, to start a career, maybe not continue with their education but move themselves…or better themselves, I guess is what I want to say. So once you see the betterment in a kid I consider that more success.

C: And you don’t have to answer this on camera if you don’t want to Joffrey, but when I was here the last time there was a girl in here rainbow grill…

J: Amber Renee Gonsales, “Showtime”.

C: Do you know what happened to her?

J: Yes. She…we are still in contact. (We were interrupted by the morning announcements.) She’s good now. She has a four year old daughter. She did a little jail time. Now cleaned up. She’s married. Husband owns a tattoo shop and she manages the taqueria out in front of the tattoo shop.

C: Really?

J: I guess it is one of those things that is a success…where she was and where she was going.

C: Well, she was afraid for her life or pretty close to that?

J: Yeah. She was a “Blood”, I believe.

C: Yeah.

J: Going in the wrong track. Obviously did end up in jail but she did straighten up. She comes up here a couple of times a year and visits me. We have had dinner a couple of times with our kids and the husband and wife…a little bit strange…two different worlds but it’s been good.

C: That’s a definition of success as far as I am concerned. (I know that Joffrey invested some time into helping that young woman get herself out of trouble. When I was there in 2008 he was trying to find sanctuary for her, at the same time knowing that she was responsible in some way for some beatings of other people. I believe he told me she was a leader in her particular gang.)

J: I guess. No. Definitely.

C: So can you parse out how much of your success has been helped by your education at Grand Valley?

J: I’ll say academic success and being prepared as a teacher. To be knowledgeable about what I need to do. I understand curriculum, understand classroom management, understand these things. Compared to a lot of teachers come in from universities other than ours, I guess here in Texas especially, like I said, Miss Michelle, our principal, wants a ‘pipeline’ to Grand Valley so I would say that is good, but I think to be successful in the classroom you have to find yourself. Everybody is going to have their own style. I joke around with my kids a lot, a lot of sarcasm and you might want to say sarcasm is bad, but that is what works for me so you have to find yourself but also take what you learned in the educational atmosphere, school, and apply that to lessons, but you have to be successful in being able to create a relationship, otherwise that is not going to happen…you are not going to be able to communicate a lesson (without creating a relationship with your students).

C: I mean it is a basic idea of trust, right?

J: Having a relationship, yeah.

C: Just a reminder and for the record, your major and minor at Grand Valley were…?

J: History major, Psych minor, but then went back and did the Group Social Studies or whatever it’s called?

C: Yeah. Group Social Studies. Ok. Biggest challenges to your career? And I’m looking at it from the standpoint that you are still teaching.

J: I would say politics.

C: Internal?

J: Internal at school. Infighting. Bickering. Especially here because we (4:40) have teams. We have a U.S. History team, World History team, World Geography team…

C: Oh, subject teams? Ok.

J: And there will be a lot of infighting there and the negativity sometimes, with teachers getting frustrated with the class sizes, students not caring. Being in this demographic, I guess, you see a lot of kids where it is a lot easier to quit than to be successful.

C: What’s the…I don’t want to say the ‘drop out rate’, but based on your knowledge of incoming freshmen and graduating seniors, how many students do you lose? Do you have an idea percentage-wise?

J: I would say close to 40.

C: Wow.

J: Maybe even 50. I think they said in Texas a couple of years ago the average Texas student takes 6 years to graduate from high school. Something like that. 5 or 6 years. I don’t know if they are dropouts or transfers because we have a pretty fluid population. They always use the term “where do you stay at?” Which I find weird because I say, “Where do you live?” I don’t know if it is “where do you stay” because they frequently move. I don’t know.

C: Well, that is similar to the Grand Rapids area. That is a fluid population (in GRPS) in all the Grand Rapids Public Schools and then the ones just outside, not so much in East Kentwood but like Godfrey-Lee, some of the smaller districts that are just outside of Grand Rapids Public or actually encapsulated in it. But going back to the challenges, what you mentioned about politics has popped up a lot of times…you are the 27th out of 28 (subjects in the study) and for the departmental interest is there anything we could do, do you think, to help students understand the internal politics of the situation before they left Grand Valley. And I’m just struggling (with how to prepare students for this situation).

J: I guess when I say ‘politics’ here it is things that are being dictated to us. That you understand…I might not agree with them…but I’m mandated to do them.

C: Would that be something we could talk about in the Capstone class or something like that?

J: I would talk about maybe problem-solving or conflict resolution.

C: Oh, yeah.

J: Being able to discuss, like Miss Andrascik (one of the GVSU grads teaching in Joffrey’s high school) just came to me this morning about, she has a team leader for her team and some individuals are not wanting to play by the same rules or being “Debbie Downer” or always talking negative and how do you resolve it. Luckily I don’t have a team, but whenever it was me…come to me first. If you have an issue with me, just be upfront with me. I don’t care. I have thick skin. I know not everybody does (have thick skin) but I think there should be some conflict resolution because a lot times…and some professionalism, emphasize professionalism. Understand when I took this job I made the commitment. I signed the contract. Maybe I should have asked more questions. Maybe…whatever that might entail, but you need to come to school every day and do what you are supposed to do. Like it or not and if you don’t like it, quit.

C: Right.

J: Leave. No one is making you. There is no gun to your head to stay here. So I understand with the politics, understanding conflict resolution, being professional. Don’t treat it like high school, like you are a student again.

C: In other words act like a mature adult?

J: Yeah. Exactly. A mature adult, essentially. I’ve really…I guess my biggest thing would be I don’t leave my classroom anymore, for the most part. I mean I associate with some people. I have my own fridge. I have my own microwave. Kind of self-contained.

C: Are you the only person who teaches Psych?

J: Yeah.

C: So ‘you’re the man’?

J: I don’t know if I’m ‘the man’, I’m more the person that teaches this.

C: So the next question on top of that then is: What methods have you adopted to deal with the stresses? Non-destructive. I always put that caveat in there.

J: Is drinking ‘destructive’?

C: It depends on how much you do. You know that.

J: I try to leave work at work. For the most part. I mean, obviously, you are going to be taking stuff home, doing lesson plans, but I try to emotionally detach from what it is when I try to go home and enjoy my life, especially having kids now. They are in daycare 8 to 10 hours a day and I only get to see them 3 to 4 hours a day so I try to take advantage of that time. When I am at work I utilize time. Like with your off period. “Ooo, Like I have an off period. Let me just relax.” Now if you get done, get done what you can get done and try to be as productive as you can because that will reduce the stress later. If it’s coming in early it’s taking a little bit later. It’s not bad. I mean, obviously, with teaching, it’s not an 8 hour job or a 40 hour work week job.

C: You are implying that it is a lot more than that, right?

J: Oh, yeah. Definitely a lot more but to have an understanding but also build connections, going back to professionalism, if you find resources, if it is in your school, out of school, people in other districts, whatnot, being able to communicate, elaborate, take criticism.

C: Do you and Meredith have a circle of friends outside of education? Or outside of teaching?

J: Yes.

C: Do you see that as helpful to dealing with the stresses?

J: It’s nice because you don’t talk about school. I mean I know teachers talk about school. Yeah, I guess I would say in our neighborhood we have our neighbors that we are relatively friendly with. Now that we are older everybody has families, less time. A lot of the Grand Valley kids come down here young. I know it is probably different for them. They socialize a lot more together. (10:55)

C: Now you are that married couple with kids.

J: Yeah, we’re ones with kids.

C: Does coaching soccer help reduce stress?

J: I don’t know if it necessarily reduces. It’s just something more I enjoy. It’s another aspect. Obviously it is even more tiring.

C: Well, yeah.

J: If you look at it, time-wise, it’s more stressful, figuring out rides and getting kids to wherever but, no, it’s something I enjoy so it’s like when I said to emotionally detach from the classwork and get your mind off something else. Something I enjoy.

C: So what keeps you coming back every day? The question is: How are you motivated to best serve your students? I mean you talked to me off camera about at times you considered leaving teaching so…

J: It can be frustrating at times.

C: Well, yeah!

J: It only takes one kid and it can really kill your day. It’s like, “Ah, crap, that kid is in 6th Period.” You start off in 1st Period, “I’m going to have to deal with this little kid.” Like I said, I try to emotionally detach. I try to wake up every day, listen to music in the morning. Something I enjoy. Try to be positive.

C: But, I mean, I caught it in your look and in your voice when you were talking about Amber.

J: No, I love it.

C: You are on a mission, aren’t you? Do you feel like that?

J: Yeah, in a way. I love, you see, I have AP every year. I like teaching those kids because they are easy. I mean anybody can teach a smart kid because they are motivated to learn, but those kids you do see struggle and you worry about and it just seems that nothing is getting through to them and then maybe one day something does. Yeah, I guess, you typically, I would say sometimes, have more losses than you do wins, but it’s the wins you have to focus on. They keep you coming back and just try to stay positive to keep that positive feeling going and, like I said, I kind of remove myself from…I don’t want the negativity around. I try to stay away from negative situations. I try to be more reflective on situations. “Ok, Junior keeps his head down all day. Well, why? Let’s find out.” If I have found out already or if I am doing something? Or is it my teaching? Or is it whatever? Try to critique myself and understand that my personal growth needs to continue. I’m not going to know it all even though I have taught the subject for 8 years, (13:40) whatever it is now. I don’t know if that really (answers the question).

C: Yeah, I mean it does and your comment about Kelli’s struggles a little bit with her team leadership and the term “Debbie Downer”…I can’t imagine coming into a job like this…I never really considered it a job…but if you started every day off with a negative attitude, this would be hell on earth doing this.

J: Yeah, when you hear it every day from somebody.

C: Or be that person, every day comes in down. What changes, if any, have occurred in the strategies and methods you use in your classroom? You had a cart the last time I was in here so I know you do the Power Point thing and all that.

J: Technology-wise, not a ton. We have Smartboards. Obviously I don’t have one in my classroom right now, but with our population technology is kind of difficult. A lot of them don’t have Internet access at home. Our district implemented an “awesome” policy that we have only have a classroom set of books or not even a classroom set of books. It’s all online for the most part which our kids are not allowed to use electrical devices during class or they don’t have Internet access at home so I would say the biggest change is we kind of have to spoon feed them a lot more.

C: Oh, really?

J: I feel as if we do because they don’t have the information elsewhere.

C: Right.

J: Or they don’t have access to the information. I understand the population a lot more. Not being able to assume some basic things. A lot of them are kind of remedial at times. I’m not going to say I have lowered my expectations but I understand I have to do more to build them to get to my expectations.

C: A better understanding of what the student population is.

J: Yeah. I would say that would be the biggest change.

C: But you have always used…I mean I saw the stuff up on the wall here (student work)…you are not the guy who stands and lectures for an entire hour all day long, right?

J: No. (15:53)

C: But you have a lot of information to deliver, too.

J: I have a ton of information. I try to do at least three things, typically speaking, in a class period. If it’s lecture, if it’s maybe them doing something on their own, if it’s a hand out or research or taking notes. If it’s an activity that they can be in groups, try to move it around. Try not to be stagnant. Try not to be repetitive. The change keeps them more focused and less bored.

C: There is a real difference in how AP teachers feel they have to teach because some, I know, feel pressure to be so scripted to prepare their kids for the AP test.

J: There is.

C: And then others say, “I can still get the information to them and they can be successful on the test, but I can teach in different ways that doesn’t mean throwing, standing in front of the classroom and giving notes all day.” So it’s a really interesting to see the changes that people feel they think they need to teach in order to reach a common goal, I guess it is the thing.

J: Now I actually look forward to teaching lessons where in the beginning it was, “Just let me survive”. You know, “Let me get through”. So have a better idea of the content and the curriculum definitely helps. But other than that I would say understanding the student body more is the biggest change.

C: And adapting your teaching to fit them.

J: Yeah. Even from class to class.

C: Oh, well. Definitely. Yeah. Well, like you said, your first hour class, for whatever reasons, the best class.

J: Yeah, they are all just “chill”. You will see when my next period comes in. They are all going to be rowdy. They will be talking. Three gentlemen will probably be fighting when they come in. Wrestling…so it’s different.

C: What types of evaluations, both informal and formal, are used to assess your teaching and how are these evaluations used to better your teaching? Or, conversely, is it detrimental? How often are you are evaluated?

J: We are evaluated by administration at least three times a year, which is a big joke.

C: Why?

J: It is useless. They don’t…they aren’t…they come in for 10 minutes.

C: That’s it? Ten minutes each time?

J: Yeah. They don’t give you constructive criticism, I wouldn’t say.

C: What does the instrument look like? Is it a checklist or…?

J: Now it’s online. It used to be a hand out, which is kind of ridiculous. I don’t value it. I don’t take it serious. It is just paperwork for them so I don’t really care about their opinions. They are somewhat removed from the classroom. I don’t have a whole lot of evaluations. The only evaluations are what I get from students and I have a student evaluation form that I give them, like after a unit or a chapter or a couple of weeks to get their feedback. Obviously I can look at their scores, quality of work. My last test, the majority of them did very poorly and looking at it some of it was my responsibility due to the fact that every kid was struggling so it has to be something with the way I wrote the test or the curriculum or what I am putting on it, the content and how well I taught it. There were some consistencies with certain problems missed so I had to go back and re-evaluate and re-teach and so forth. I do have one district evaluation but that’s a joke too. I feel like a 5th grader could walk in and take one and do pretty well on it. Other than that I guess it’s self-critique.

C: To re-state what you said then, you value the feedback from your student evaluations more than you do the administration’s evaluations?

J: They are the only ones I care about (the students’ evaluations). They, at least, are going to be brutally honest. I tell them, “If you want to tell me that I am the worst freaking teacher in the world, say it. But give me a reason why I am the worst teacher in the world. I don’t care what you call me. I’m not asking you to put your name on it. All I am asking is for is an explanation. So I’m not going to hold anything against you. It’s not me. I’ve already got my education. I’m getting my paycheck no matter what. You are the ones that have much more to gain from this than I do.” It’s their opinion that I care more about, I guess.

C: And that’s another thing in this study, a lot of…Michigan, all the way around, the nature of evaluations has changed to a lot more of those short drop-ins with a lot less feedback and a lot less application to (their teaching). “I get this good feedback from an administrator and I am going to make this positive change in the way I teach” to “It’s like 10 minutes, 15 minutes, almost no feedback, no impact.” That’s sad.

J: Because they are detached from the classroom. They don’t know what the classroom is like anymore. They don’t understand. A lot of them, I think, are…they don’t comprehend what we do. Now, I obviously don’t know all their job expectations. “You haven’t been in the classroom. You are not there dealing with ‘Johnny’ or ‘Sue’ every single day. So you need to look back and see, yeah, maybe you can critique me on some things.” They want us to have the objective on the board every day and whatever. “I’m sorry. If I am a good teacher my kids know what to expect the next day or what they are going to be learning today.”

C: That’s like a hoop to jump through versus…

J: Yeah, I feel like I spend more time on paperwork, pushing things, stupid things than they allow me to focus on the classroom.

C: Yikes! What types of mentoring were you provided and how would you characterize the results of the mentoring provided and since you are the only one who teaches this (AP Psych), I know from the last time back in 2008 you said that one of the older teachers basically opened his files for you.

J: Some of the previous teachers…the ones here didn’t do a whole lot because they are both gone. Meeting other teachers in the district really helped me out. The school doesn’t provide that (teacher mentors). I guess they do provide district meetings where we get together but it is your job to basically seek it (mentoring help) and I had to build a relationship with people and ask for help.

C: So no one…when you came in…they said, “This is your mentor.”

J: I had two mentors, which neither one ever came to my classroom and neither one ever did I ever meet all year, but it was the mentor program.

C: Ok, that was the mentor program. (22:54)

J: It’s better now, I would say. I wouldn’t say it was a whole lot better because sometimes they are giving you mentors that are not even in your content or in your department, which doesn’t make sense to me.

C: No.

J: Yes, I understand that they can help you with teaching things but my biggest factor as far as things when I first got here was curriculum. Understanding what I was mandated to teach. How I am going to go about doing that? Sequence of whatever, but I wasn’t provided a whole lot. I know I was Surabian’s sponsor (another GVSU grad who teaches in the next hall over in Joffrey’s high school), mentor, which I think was all right. I wasn’t in the content but he had another great teacher over there who is no longer here.

C: But at least you knew what he was teaching.

J: But we would get together and talk and allowed him to vent and explain and give him ideas and at least explain how the school worked and some things.

C: And that’s the other thing, too, is most people focus on how to understand the curriculum and content, like you said, but the other responses (in the study) have been, “I need to understand the minutiae of what…the paperwork or the grading…

J: The grading software or taking attendance or the policies…

C: So you got some of that (when you started)?

J: No. When I walked in here Day 1 I had no clue. I had to go next door to find out how to take attendance because no one had come by during the week and they were all too busy to help.

C: Congratulations for surviving. Holy Crap!

J: Of course you hear different. When you’re going to get hired you hear different.

C: Yeah, but reality is what counts. Especially if you… Have you pursued continuing education, either in the form of a graduate program or professional development and how has this education influenced your success in the classroom?

J: I have not. I have wanted to but kids through a little bit of a hamper into the deal. I was deciding what I wanted to do when I go back for my Master’s, whether it was education or if I wanted to go into something more content related, like History or Psychology.

C: I heard you tell the kids that you don’t want to be a principal.

J: No, I don’t ever want to be a principal, so definitely not administration but Meredith jumped at the deal to go get her Master’s. She really wanted to be a librarian so I said, “If you know 100%, you’re focused…” Currently I am looking at an online program through Lamar University.

C: Oh, yeah. I have heard about that actually. Erica did it. Erica Robinson.

J: The administration one?

C: Yeah.

J: It’s a joke.

C: Oh.

J: It’s a joke. I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t hire you from there if you had it. They have other programs that I was looking into but I haven’t really decided. It’s hard. With time, with soccer, classes, kids. But, no, I would like to pursue a Master’s in something. I just have to find the time.

C: Well, I can totally relate to that. I got my undergrad degree in ’73 and I didn’t get my Master’s until ’89.

J: I wish I had done it earlier.

C: Me too. But I had kids and I was coaching and we moved from New York to Kansas so I was starting all over again, basically, and, phfff, forget it.

J: I definitely believe you should have it before you start a family if you really want to (get it).

C: It’s a full time job in itself. (Raising a family)

J: Definitely.

C: But you do have some professional development or not? I mean did you have AP training before you came here or did you have to go get it?

J: No, I had AP. I wasn’t supposed to have it. They gave me an AP class, but I wasn’t actually certified. I did a two day seminar in December, after the first seminar, essentially and then the next summer I did the AP Institute at Rice University, which is phenomenal. They are really good. The AP Institutes are…even if you are not teaching AP I think it’s a great resource.

C: Yeah. (I took a weekend seminar from AP when I was teaching in Kansas and I thought it helped me teach my regular History classes.)

J: They feed you well too, so that was actually pleasant. Most of the professional development through the district is, what I would say, awful. Boring. The big thing they want to teach here is differentiation.

C: That’s common around the country.

J: It’s like, if you are a good teacher, you already do it.

C: Right.

J: And so I understand that not everybody is going to have it, but they are very hypocritical about the way they teach it to you and what they want you to do.

C: They don’t differentiate their instruction?

J: No. They will lecture to you for six hours and expect you to be attentive and we are just like other people. I don’t want to sit there for six hours in a lecture hall and just sit there and you clicking through a PowerPoint and me looking at this piece of paper wondering, “What the hell time am I going to get out of here?” “Or where do I want to go for lunch?” There have been a few good ones but a lot of times I don’t think they are very productive. A lot of times they try to get our fellow teachers in the district to teach it (PD) and I don’t think there is that many highly skilled teachers or they don’t have a good idea or they don’t actually plan for it. It’s just, “Ok, this is a curriculum day so here.” Which is sad but part of the politics. Play the game. Jump through the hoops.

C: Next question: “Pearls of Wisdom”. What would you tell current students, and I have shared this over and over again…I showed my students that you kissed a pig…what to make sure you know before you started teaching. In other words, what do you wish you knew before you left Grand Valley and started your career? (28:54)

J: I guess, realistically, how much time I was going to put (into teaching).

C: Do you still get here at 6:30 in the morning?

J: I get here at 6:30 and I leave here at like 4:15.

C: So that hasn’t changed?

J: Not really. I mean there are days that I have to leave early to get Layla to gymnastics or whatnot but I am typically here. Like I said I try to utilize that time. Be productive at those times so I don’t take stuff home with me, so to speak, but…

C: Are you doing less of that, taking stuff home or did you always try to be that way?

J: Approximately in the last 4 or 5 years I take a lot less home but I have also developed lessons so instead of creating the whole lesson…

C: Tweak it now…

J: Tweak it or obviously you have to add in a new lesson sometimes because lessons suck but what I guess I really knew…time…how frustrating it can be.

C: And that’s the tough part from my standpoint and I’m sure it’s the other guys from the History Department, is how realistic to make it to the point where people still want to go into it? So I don’t want to paint this “all rosy” picture…

J: No, that’s not…

C: But I could go in and tell horror stories every day and I don’t want to do that.

J: I mean I guess I say how frustrating…you are going to be frustrated, I guess, in any job or whatever. It’s fun. It’s a new experience every day. You know you don’t get the same thing every day, but being prepared to understand that frustration a little more and deal with it. When you are in college you are surrounded by people who want to learn.

C: And they are paying big bucks for it.

J: And then when you walk into a high school, middle school, maybe elementary, not everybody is going to be that way. And so to understand how much the dynamic changes. And, yes, you get that in student teaching or teacher-assisting but I don’t think it was that real to me at that point because that wasn’t my classroom, so to speak. I was going to be walking away from it and you don’t necessarily feel the need to grasp the understanding of it so much knowing that at the end of it you are escaping but now we don’t escape.

C: You’re here!

J: You’re here every day for the whole entire year.

C: And that’s another thing that we have been struggling with is, knowing that we can’t totally replicate that “you’re it” classroom, trying to get that understanding of all the things that go into teaching as early as possible. If we could impact a freshman or a sophomore so they had that understanding versus here they are through student teaching and they go, “Crap! I don’t want to do this.” But everybody is going, “How do we replicate that?” and I’m not sure we can.

J: I don’t think you can. I love teaching. I know I’ve thought about getting out, especially down here with a bunch of oil people making beaucoup bucks…

C: The money down here is unbelievable!

J: I have friends here whose quarterly freakin’, whatever, what word am I looking for? Reward? Bonus. It’s been like $50,000. That’s basically my salary. Beyond that stuff I also wish I had known how to understand the politics. Identify them. Be aware of how to better handle them. You can’t come in as an arrogant teacher or a “know it all” teacher. Your ideas are probably a lot better than a lot of people that have been there because they have gotten stagnant. But you can’t come in…they don’t want their toes stepped on. They are a little bit slower to open up to change. Those types of things. I would also want to know more about school policy. I wish I knew more questions to ask in an interview. What things should I be aware of? What types of policies to institute? Like here, you can turn in work basically any time you want. Late, whatever, and I’m supposed to take it because we have a zero policy for zeros. We don’t want kids to have zeros in the grade book. I don’t agree with it.

C: Yeah. Because they are not getting any responsibility from that.

J: You know the support for me at work, which I am fine with that, but just to try to understand the different intricacies of school.

C: So you are telling me if a kid…this is the end of the marking period, right?

J: Yeah, they have to have it in by the end of the marking period. But if I started something 5 or 6 weeks ago…

C: But if I started something 5 weeks ago…?

J: They want me to still take it.

C: And give it credit?

J: Give it credit. Maybe not full credit…probably not full credit but also we are also giving…we’re mandated to provide re-takes of tests for kids who fail.

C: How many times? Forever?

J: At least one. Teacher discrepancy would be another. They put the blame more on teachers. The kid has a zero because I’m not staying on top of them. It’s not the kid has a zero because I am holding them accountable and they don’t want to do it. A due date isn’t a due date anymore.

C: This is like a “moderately at-risk school”?

J: Oh, yeah. It’s all about numbers.

C: And these kids…my understanding would be one of the things they lack is being held responsible. (34:56) And so this school is just engendering that then, reinforcing it.

J: That’s the way I feel, but they say, “We’re looking out (for the students).” You put a positive spin on things. “We want kids to be successful, and if successful, they can do the work and we want them to get their work done.” But it’s the way you want to perceive it. Because you want to know how the school works, the function of school before I was hired I would have liked to know (this was their philosophy and policy). You have to try to go somewhere where you are comfortable and understand those types of things.

C: Well, you know, while you said that I know or I think I remember you had an opportunity to choose what school when you came down here or you were going to be here no matter what?

J: (Joffrey shook his head “no”). Meredith had the opportunity.

C: I mean, do you have…they are building new schools, two new schools now so if you said, “Hey, I want to teach over there now…”

J: You could put yourself on the transfer list.

C: Ok.

J: It doesn’t mean you are going to be picked up.

C: Right.

J: But, I mean, I could. Otherwise I could quit and try to find another job.

C: Well, there’s a choice. But I mean, Erica brought that up. She said she was so glad that she is out of Spring Branch and from my understanding (Cinco Ranch and Spring Branch) are different ends of the spectrum. Spring Branch versus Cinco.

J: Yeah. Aldine. I don’t know if you knew Tristan Forgach?

C: (He was a student in my Capstone class). Yeah.

J: He was over there and it’s funny how he sings its praises while he’s there but now he is over in Katy also. It’s so much better. Those two schools are minorities versus affluent white, essentially. And both of them went from minority and poverty to affluent and let’s be honest, anybody can teach a smart white kid. Your better teachers are going to be in your rougher schools. If you get a motivated kid that doesn’t want to be motivated…you, sure as hell can motivate someone who is motivated.

C: That’s totally understandable.

J: It’s not the content for me…understanding content. It’s for me conveying that to them and the pace at which to work. So.

C: If you have a kid who has a great home life and parents who are holding them responsible and you throw them a book or whatever material you can help them better, but they can learn on their own.

J: Even Cy-Ranch here is our affluent white area school and the person who teaches AP Euro…I don’t know how many kids in the class…they gave him 15 textbooks for the entire AP. Not enough textbooks for the amount of students in there. Every school had the same problem. Cy-Ranch, the teacher instructs the kid, “You need to go buy it.” The kid is going to buy it. Our kids, no.

C: They couldn’t afford it.

J: No. They can’t afford it.

C: Because that’s like $100 textbook.

J: So, it’s understanding where you are going to be and the problems you are going to encounter is the biggest thing I wished I would have understood. (I didn’t ask the same question and found out I only had a classroom set of books in my junior high position in New York.) But, hey, that’s part of the fun, right?

C: It better be.

J: Yeah, what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger?

C: Last question: And you can choose to answer this or not: Was there any information that you would like to add about your teaching career that I didn’t cover in the questions? And feel free, you know you can contact me any time. If there is anything that, you know, during the day or after I leave you want to say, “Hey, I meant to say this” or “Maybe I should revise that” you can always contact me, but is there anything else you want to add?

J: Maybe I came across as negative. I really do love teaching. I’m here. I’ll partake in this. I’m not partaking in this (study) to discourage kids. Just being realistic. It is rewarding to see some of these kids and work with some of these kids. Yes, I am going to be frustrated at times and most people would focus on the negative, but you are only going to be as good as you want to be and I would say it is a job that provides a lot of rewards but you are going to have to have the right personality. I think what everybody told me, “If you can make it the first three years you will survive as a teacher.” And just giving the information that you will be more realistic I would have appreciated a little more of that. I do feel as if we did pretty well. All the Grand Valley people in Texas, at least in our district, is building quite the reputation.

C: I got the same thing from Cinco Ranch. One of their Aps said, “Anything we can do to make a better tighter connection to Grand Valley, and as far as I know Erica is the only one (from GVSU at Cinco Ranch) and she is only in her first semester there, so…

J: Cinco Ranch…I know there has been a couple others in Katy. I don’t know. I can’t remember names. But, no, I don’t have a whole lot else to share. I’ve enjoyed it. I’m still here…thinking. I haven’t quit. The only thought about leaving is money, just because it’s hard.

C: Especially in comparison to the wealth in this area.

J: Oh, yeah. Damn oil business people. Getting bonuses, quarterly. Ridiculous, but, no, I guess, other than that.

C: Thanks Joffrey.