Kim Harrison Kocsis Oct 2 2015

Oakland ISD

C: It is October 2nd 2015. I am with Kim Kocsis, who used to be Kim Harrison…

K: I have not heard that in a while.

C: …When I first met her and you graduated in 2004 and you just got through recounting all the different changes in your career, which is amazing, as far as I am concerned…

K: Thank you.

C: So let’s start right off and we can go in whatever direction you want to. How do you define “success” in teaching and you have multiple perspectives and do you believe Grand Valley prepared you for success in the classroom, and you have already commented a little bit before the video started on it so you can answer that question in any order you want to.

K: (00:43-8:37) Sure. When I was thinking about defining “success” in the classroom I thought about me as a teacher with my own students and now watching the teachers that I’m leading with their students and it always focuses on back on the students. Personally when I define “success” in the classroom, I’m looking at that group of students in the classroom and I just wrote down a couple of things: Are those students engaged? Do those students feel cared about? Do they find meaning in what they are doing? (relevancy in the content and activities to their lives) Can they articulate to you what they are doing or what the objective of the day or the lesson is, or even the week or the unit? I think that’s really important. Are they striving to do their best? So maybe they are not completely mastering but are they striving to do their best? Are they reaching mastery of those standards? Because that’s important for teaching them, both skills and content, both of them, both of those standards, and then, really important to me, can they articulate the connections to what’s happening in your classroom and the world outside them. So whether you are a Social Studies, an English teacher or a Math teacher, can they talk about, “What am I doing now and why is that important when I’m leaving?” So when I am looking at successful teaching I look at that body of students and are they meeting these criteria? To me that’s a successful day or successful week in the classroom.

C: Now, a lot of people so far, in this study, have talked about not necessarily meeting, but being able to show growth and some of the people I’ve talked to, like Troy Vanderlaan in East Kentwood, they measure everything against growth and if they don’t necessarily meet…he said, “It’s not that we don’t pay attention to the state test scores, but we need to show that our students and if they don’t meet it but they are still growing then that’s ok with the district philosophy.” So where does that fit in with what you are doing?

K: (2:30) So my personal philosophy, absolutely. I think because you are coming to me today and the district that I’m working in and the scrutiny that the district is under, they are looking at growth from one side but then we’re looking at our students meeting the standard and the expectations around the rest of the county, which was probably why while I was scrubbing this out last night that’s what I wrote. When I think of my own teaching, I was absolutely looking for growth, and I had districts that supported that. But that’s not always the case.

C: Right.

K: So I’m in a district right now where my teachers are being highly measured based on those state tests scores.

C: And so it’s not that growth doesn’t matter, but it’s more important to meet the standards.

K: Absolutely growth matters but for them and their jobs and the survival of the district right now it’s based on the mastery of those standards. And that’s tough. That’s hard, especially when our kids are grade levels below where they should be. I mean massive grade levels below. We have seniors with 3rd grade reading levels.

C: Wow!

K: But that’s why it’s one bullet point and all those other things are really important for successful teaching as well. Can they talk to you about what they are doing? Can they make connections about what they are doing? Are they engaged with the work? Do they feel accountable for the work? To me, all of that makes successful teaching as well. Then you ask, did Grand Valley prepare me to do those things and I think, and I don’t want this to sound negative, I think on a basic level it absolutely did, because I learned engaging teaching strategies. I learned basic classroom management. It’s like we had a “toolkit” of things that we could start with but the truth is, and I think most people would agree, you don’t start really learning how to do those things until my first three years on the job. That’s when I finally felt, “Ok, I like I’m not just in survival mode, but I really know what I’m doing now.” I think.

C: Yeah, and the university, both within the History Department and the College of Education, we’ve talked about multiple ways to try to get people more field experience, but I don’t know, and several of the teachers in the study have said, “There is no way to replicate, within the college environment real life.”

K: No, and so I wonder, and we had this conversation, when I was in my Master’s program (at Western Michigan) and it was for administration, all of my professors were either current or former administrators, who would kind of paint a realistic picture of things that they dealt with. My favorite part about the program was the storytelling from my professors and just being able to relate to that. We talked about just the idea that you may walk into one school district and have a working copy machine and a Smartboard and then in next district you walk into you might have no paper and a chalkboard and so somehow just preparing students for those disparities but that your instructional strategies and preparing students shouldn’t change, right? You have to keep using quality instruction and so that’s what I am working with teachers on now. So you adapt to the room that you are in and the resources you have, but the students still have the meet the same standards.

C: Yeah.

K: Right?

C: Right.

K: So I don’t know how we do that, but maybe that’s part of the conversation.

C: Especially when some of the standards are almost inextricably tied to ability to use some of the technology that’s not available. Even in the state teaching standards we are trying to answer and change some of the Social Studies major because students have to know what Geographic Information Systems and GPS is. And, ok, yeah, because of the spectrum you may enter in the profession, but that may not…is that information as important as dealing in a high poverty area with kids with multiple problems that they are bringing to school, just beyond the poverty (problems).

K: Right. So it’s helping them, “How can I access that information?” “How can I find that information and then what do I do with it?”

C: Right.

K: That’s a lot of what we focus on.

C: And I’ve been in 6th grade classrooms where every kid can pull out a Smartphone and can access some online (app), like Cahoot (quizzing software) or In Quiz It or Socrative or something like that and then…

K: And you’ll find, so that’s part of, that’s us being flexible and being able to adapt to situations because I’ve found in the most high poverty rooms a majority of those students will still be able to pull out that phone.

C: Really?

K: Um, hmm. So even if they, I know there’s research behind that and I can’t quote it right now or cite it but they might not have cable at home or they might not have enough to eat but for whatever reason they have those cell phones and so leveraging that for them. Leveraging whatever technology is available.

C: Right.

K: To let them access that information.

C: And probably within, correct me if I’m wrong, please, within Oakland ISD, you probably have some of the richest and poorest schools in the state?

K: (She nodded her head in assent.) There’s a huge disparity. Absolutely.

C: So if you can get the “magic bullet” for us to do that at Grand Valley (help teacher candidates prepare for teaching is such widely different environments. We somewhat answer that problem by the two placements. Certainly much more than other colleges, with a single student teacher placement for their students do.)

K: I’ll keep thinking about it but it’s just something that…so doing this with you has allowed me to be really reflective this week in a way that I probably haven’t done in a long time, going back to undergrad and connecting it to where I’ve been so some of these things have been on my mind. Things that I just wasn’t…things that I didn’t even have an idea of, going from Allendale to West Ottawa to then a situation like Pontiac.

C: It sounds like you need to be a guest speaker for the university sometime.

K: I would love that.

C: That will be in the list. Anything else you want to say about Question #1?

K: I don’t think so. (8:37)

C: Ok. Biggest challenges to your career?

K: The first one I wrote at the time, in the immediate moment, all of the lay-offs. But in reality it has brought me to where I am today. If I hadn’t had all those lay-offs I might still be a high school Social Studies teacher at Allendale High School which could be…

C: And a darned good one!

K: …fantastic. Right? That would be a great job but because of all the lay-offs I have ended up with up, like I was telling you, opportunities that I didn’t even know existed. Right? I didn’t know…and I guess that’s another thing that I don’t know that I learned at Grand Valley. I didn’t really understand in Michigan what an ISD was and all the resources that were available to me. In my first couple of years of teaching I could have really leaned on the ISD and the support there and I didn’t even know that it existed. And so now working at one and providing that support to the teachers in the county, that’s something that I wish I would have known.

C: And that’s one reason why I joined the Board (of Ottawa ISD).

K: Yeah.

C: I actually have my Capstone students come to a Board meeting.

K: Right.

C: I know that’s such really a small microcosm…

K: A small picture, but even to expose them to it. I don’t think I learned what an ISD was, and I don’t know why this was true, but until I was asked to be, when the Civics and Econ Power Standards were written, I was on that team at the Ottawa ISD and that was the first time I was exposed to the work of an ISD.

C: Were you working with Cathy Feyt?

K: At the time…yep. But at the time, when you’re laid off from a teaching job and you don’t know what’s next, that’s a challenge and that’s stressful and then, like I said, I jumped from district to district every summer so always starting brand new, back at the bottom of the pay scale…all of those things were tough. The lowest on the seniority list. And then another challenge to my career is more of a personal one, not having enough time, and I felt like this since I was in the classroom, and now it’s even a bigger strain today, but to accomplish everything I need to for my students and my teachers and my colleagues and then still find the time to be a really good mom and a good wife and a sister and a friend and even have time for myself. That’s tough because this job doesn’t turn off and it was the same for me when I was a teacher. Right? Because you’re always thinking, “What am I going to do the next day? How am I going to hook ‘em? This one kid, what am I going to do with him?” So that’s been a struggle but I’m getting better at dealing with, although I said that to my husband last night and he shook his head at me that that’s not true. But knowing when it’s ok to leave “work” at work because it will still be there the next day. That’s something that I am really striving for. And then another challenge, I said, in education, there’s a lot to keep up with and be on top of. So there’s always the new tool or the new strategy or the new technology or the new program. And the truth is, part of what happens here of the work at the ISD is a lot of that can be vetted for teachers so we try to bring the best things out to the teachers. But even as a classroom teacher, or as someone in my position where I am imbedded in the district right now, staying on top of that to make sure that our students have the same opportunities as everybody else’s students, so that we are all kind of on a level playing field, which is impossible, but that’s what we’re trying to do.

C: Yeah.

K: I said lack of resources. I’ve talked about that. We talked about all the “pulls” on teachers and administrators outside of the classroom and how little time is left for instruction…in certain districts. I think there’s “pulls” everywhere, no matter what district you are in, but the more of a “priority” district that you are, the more of those outside “pulls” you are getting. (12:20) So you’ve got your state monitors and your reporting and all the extra testing, on top of the MME and the ACT or SAT. You have to run an ILT team (Instructional Leadership Team) and all of these things that tend to get “siloed” and become compliance rather than working together to move instruction forward and have students grow. So that’s been really challenging in helping them manage that, for both teachers and I said for administrators, too. There’s little time for administrators, and again, I’m talking about these “priority” districts, to do classroom walk-throughs or sit with a group of kids in a history class and hear about what they’re learning and then give honest feedback to those teachers about what’s going on in the school because they are constantly filling out reports and paperwork and sitting in meetings and being with monitors and it’s just… We’ve created a system that’s really broken. Not “we” because you and I didn’t create it.

C: I’m on the Ottawa Area School Boards Association, too, and I meet with all the administrators from those 15 districts that feed into Ottawa and when the law changed about teacher evaluation I was in a room with all these principals and superintendents and they are looking at each other like, “There is no way that we can accomplish this.”

K: Right.

C: “We have to by law and there is no way.”

K: So then it feels more like compliance and less authentic and meaningful. It’s frustrating because our goal should all be to help our students grow and to help our teachers grow and we’re setting up all these systems that are just not allowing for that.

C: And it’s…and I know, not so much within the study but outside, just the general feedback that I get from teachers, somehow they don’t think the administrators are involved, maybe it’s part of that compliance perception but most of the teachers in the study say that they are being worked to death. They can’t keep up. The teachers realize the principals can’t keep up so that’s kind of a good thing because it’s like, “We’re all in this together but what we’re battling is really hard.”

K: Yeah. It is. I don’t know what else to say about that, although…so only in…this is going back to when I was in the classroom…I only experienced this with one administrator where he truly did informal walk-throughs and really took notice of what was happening in the classroom and did a really good job of providing authentic feedback and we had a feedback loop that went both ways and that was really powerful both within my professional growth, but also just in morale amongst the teachers and my colleagues. And so, not only are teachers not able to experience that professional growth side, but I feel like morale is lower, even.

C: Yeah. Oh, it is.

K: Because they feel like they are being worked to death, both teachers and administrators and they don’t feel like they are being…that’s the whole idea that you are so tired at the end of the day that you think, “I’ll take 3 hours off. Ok, I’ll just do it at 8 o’clock.” I used to do that all the time. I still do it. And 8 o’clock comes and you’re like, “Ok…” You either have to start working or set your alarm for 2 hours earlier…it’s just this constant cycle. And it’s because you are trying to do what’s best for those students.

C: And that’s the common good theme, out of this, so far, is, whether they have become administrators or whatever, but the ones still involved in education, “It’s for the kids.” I mean it’s definitely that. So are you ready for (Question) 3?

K: Yeah.

C: What methods have you adopted to deal with the stresses of a challenging career? And I always, I put a caveat in…non-destructive, Kim.

K: Right. I don’t have a ton. This is what I need to get better at. One has been collaboration with my colleagues because we don’t have to do everything on our own. So whether that was when I was in the classroom really co-planning with another teacher...it’s still the same amount of work, but you’re bouncing ideas of each other. You feel better. When I was teaching Economics at Zeeland there was a middle school teacher who had to come over (from Zeeland West) for two sections a day to teach high school Economics so he and I sat every…I don’t remember when we did, but once a week we would sit down, just for a couple of hours and do planning and it was a lot of work but it was a stress relief because we were doing it together. Right?

C: Yeah.

K: And sometimes we get “siloed” in education. You shut your door and it’s “The things I have to do right here, right now” but really leaning on each other in that way and in this position, I get things thrown at me all the time. “Can you get this done? Can you be on this committee? Can you go to this meeting? Can you speak at this conference? Can you…?” So this is all thrown at you and sometimes you have to say, “I can’t do that right now. So and so, can you help me get this done?” Or kind of work with your colleagues to delegate those tasks. So I’ve gotten better at that. I don’t have to do it all on myself. Another one I wrote was trying to set a time at night, especially now that I have a 3 year old, where, ok, if it’s 7 o’clock or 6:30 or 6 or whatever I stated for the night, that’s when I am putting my computer away because it will all still be there in the morning.

C: Right.

K: So that’s been good for me. The hard part is that it still shows up on your cell phones and people can still reach you even if you don’t have your computer on, so still a struggle but I’m trying. And then something I have always done even since I was a classroom teacher is that I keep a pen and a notebook next to my bed because I always wake up in the middle of the night with ideas or something I forgot or whatever, so if I can just quick write it down and set it aside, it allows me to move on with the night. That’s silly, but it’s worked for me.

C: That’s not silly.

K: It’s definitely worked for me.

C: If it works, then it’s not silly.

K: Yes. Sometimes in the morning the notes don’t always make complete sense, but if I wake up with a brilliant idea or I think it’s a brilliant idea or I remembered something I have to do, I’ll just quick jot it down on my notepad and then take it with me the next day to work.

C: And I have a notepad on this (my cell phone) and it’s on “Do Not Disturb” starting at 10 o’clock but I can type notes or voice notes into it.

K: So I am still and people…my husband laughs…I have all these devices because I do a lot of technology integration training and blended learning training (19:08) but still if I need to remember something I still keep a paper planner. That’s really helpful to me. I also have to keep it on my calendar so my colleagues can see it, but I still, if you look at my desk at work it’s covered in sticky notes. To me, that’s how my brain operates and so I actually use that example when I am talking to teachers, that that’s ok. It’s a good mix. A healthy mix of both and that’s all right. But that’s been a help with stress relief. I tried going 100% technology and that was not.

C: It didn’t work for you.

K: It didn’t work for me.

C: It sounds like you are organized.

K: Yes.

C: Because that’s something…I mean I say that flat out to my students, starting in the Methods class. “If you realize that you are unorganized, you need to get there before you graduate because this job will eat you alive…

K: Yes.

C: …if you are unorganized.

K: Absolutely. I would agree with that.

C: Ok. Maybe I’m doing one thing right. Other things within 3?

K: That’s all I could come up with.

C: That’s…you don’t have to invent things. Life is tough enough as it is.

K: I didn’t want to pretend. That’s honest.

C: No, don’t. So with all the stresses and all the challenges, what motivates you to continue in this career?

K: The kids.

C: Yep.

K: Right?

C: Yeah.

K: So my students I see every day in Pontiac and then it was just last night, they find you, once they graduate they can always find you. I had one “tweeting” me last night on “Twitter” that he just got a job. He’s one of my former Zeeland students. He’s a graphic designer in Chicago. It’s a dream job so you just have these stories constantly coming back to you, because they will find you, and that is what motivates you to go to work every day. It can’t be the paycheck.

C: No, you’re right.

K: This isn’t a job where you’re motivated by money.

C: You want to laugh about ‘summers off’ too?

K: Right.

C: Or how it’s a 9 to 5 job?

K: Right. And there will be those days where you wish that that is what you had. Like, I remember as a classroom teacher, “I am going to quit this and I’m going to go be a receptionist somewhere and I’m going to leave my work at 5 o’clock and not come back until 9 o’clock the next morning” and because it’s a different lifestyle when you are in education because you are always striving to do the best for those kids…if you are in it for the right reasons.

C: Exactly.

K: Right.

C: I have another good Zeeland story for you.

K: You do?

C: Yeah.

K: Ok.

C: When I came and talked to your Government (class), well, I guess it was the day that I was doing the visit too, I talked to your Government class. It might have been your AP class?

K: Right.

C: There was a young lady in there who later went onto Harvard or Yale and now she’s working in the Pentagon.

K: See?

C: And it was Mary Schutten’s niece and Mary Schutten was the Associate Dean (of CLAS) for a while, now she out at…

K: That’s awesome.

C: Mary would say, “She had a really good government teacher” but she said, “When you (me) talked about running for political office…”

K: Yeah, you came and talked about running for political office.

C: She (Mary) said that struck a cord for her (niece) and she went into International Relations or something like that…

K: That’s amazing.

C: …I think she went to Harvard and maybe she was rowing on the crew team? But then her path is like, crazy.

K: And so that’s motivating, right?

C: I would hope so.

K: That’s why you go into this profession…I mean when you decide whether…I decided when I wanted to be a teacher when I was in elementary school. I just always knew that’s what I would do. I didn’t know what kind of teacher because when I started at Grand Valley I was in Elementary Education. And I remembered the summer I called my dad and said…it was when I took the Elementary Methods Math class, and they had us building abacuses and I said, “What am I doing? This is not for me.” And then I had a Political Science class that I loved but I don’t remember the professor’s name, but I called my dad and said, “I think I want to switch so that means I…”

C: Kevin Den Dulk, maybe?

K: Yes! I think that was his name but I said, “I think I want to switch but that means I have to pick up 18 additional credits of Social Studies over the course of the summer and the semester” and so we went back and forth and I did it and went into secondary but when you make that decision, whether it’s Elementary or Secondary, whatever it is to go into education, it’s because you want to help students. Right? Because you care about…school is so important, and it’s not looked at as important at all when you see the stories on the news. They’re hard. The stories they put on like teachers doing bad things. It’s just that we get such a negative rap. It’s so important.

C: Yeah. I mean it’s foundational.

K: Yeah. And then now, the position I’m in now, I watch my teachers and how hard they are working with so little, and so I’m motivated by our students there as well but also I want to learn more so I can bring more to those teachers so that’s part of my motivation now in the role that I have. Being the best consultant I can be. They think of me as a coach and being able to bring them new strategies and I scrounge up resources where I can find them and just really helping them in their classrooms engage their students motivates me.

C: And like you said, if you are a good (teacher)…if you are in this for the right reasons that should be your primary motivation. It’s interesting, a couple of people, both one of the people who have become an administrator, a principal and one of the teachers said, not, as advice to the Grand Valley students, not to take a Master’s in the content area because it was more important to take graduate credit in how you can engage students and pedagogy than it would be necessarily content.

K: Yeah.

C: And do you have a comment about that?

K: I would intend to agree with that. We live in a completely different society now whereas if you asked me a content question I can find it in less than 60 seconds. (If you knew how to start your research and knew the context and significance of the answer.) I can probably find the answer, so now it’s about how we are teaching the kids. How are we teaching them to access that information? What do you do with it? How do you know if it’s reliable? When I think back to when I was in high school I had to memorize dates and vocabulary words and names and that is not the education that we’re in today. And we don’t…it’s not going to change. This rush of information and data is just going to keep getting bigger…

C: Right.

K: …as technology continues to grow. (25:45) I don’t know if we’re the same content experts that my high school teachers were. I definitely wasn’t. When you think about a Social Studies degree; I took 2 Economics classes, my entire college career and I was an Economics teacher.

C: Right.

K: So it was all about, a lot of it was me learning, right? The night before or on the weekend, reading and learning and researching so I would be a good resource for the students, but then helping them guide through that work about how to learn Economics and what do we do with it and how do we use it? Not memorizing every single vocabulary word. And if I were to go back into the classroom today I would do it, I know that’s another question today, I would do it even differently than I did then. I would tend to agree with that (not pursuing a content Master’s.)

C: Ok. So we are picking up again with Question 5: What changes, if any, and, boy, you’re in a great position to answer this question, have occurred in the methods and strategies you have use in your classroom, in your multiple classrooms?

K: (26:48) So if I had the opportunity to go back and do it again, in a Zeeland classroom or an Allendale classroom or any classroom, I would definitely do a lot less teacher-led instruction and a lot more student, inquiry-based led instruction and learning. I think I was pretty good at it when I was in the classroom but I would always have that time where we would have the notes and I would have the Power Point and I would be telling the story and taking them through that information and that’s ok, but now when I see teachers who have the ability to pose a question and have students start investigating and figure out what’s important to them and then the teachers jumping in there with little bits of information but not necessarily just providing them with the information at the front of a lesson or at the beginning, I definitely would change the way I did that. I would have, assuming I had the technology to do it, I would love to teach in a blended learning environment, which I didn’t have the opportunity to do until my last year in the classroom, so I’m doing more of that because it really allows for individualizing for students in a way that just a traditional classroom setting doesn’t.

C: Right.

K: You can still individualize in a traditional setting and you can still differentiate but when you have the power of grouping, like you do with technology and you have the ability to put different resources in for different groups of students and different levels it’s really powerful.

C: Yep.

K: And there’s so much more stuff out there now that just wasn’t when I was in the classroom so online content that students can engage with and adaptive technologies that will meet them at their level and then the work that you’re doing in the classroom is so much more meaningful because they are getting that exact moment of what they need. So I would love to be able to do that if I went back into the classroom. And the one that I actually wanted to talk to you about because I’m wrestling with this, is the idea of grading. Grading is not something that we talked about at Grand Valley, unless I just don’t remember that we talked about it.

C: No.

K: It’s a really important piece of teaching.

C: They now have a, since you graduated, they have an assessment class.

K: Ok.

C: Yeah.

K: I think that’s important because when I think back to how I…when I was teaching…when I had my Social Studies classrooms 5 hours a day, and how I graded my students, I graded my assessments. I had formative and I had summative. I graded my summative assessments. I graded a lot of homework. I would give kids credit for effort, which now seems so arbitrary to me, the more and more I have learned about grading and why feedback is meaningful. When I look at grading now I think about, if I were to do it again, what am I really grading them on? Skills and content. Right? Then I think about myself as a student in high school, if I didn’t get the effort grade and the extra credit grade and all of those grades, I would not have been the A/B student that I was and I may not have gotten into the school that I did and I may not be where I am right now. (But effort and the perseverance and discipline to create that effort is important.) I was not the student who was learning the science and learning the math. I was the student who could fake it. I turned in…I never missed a homework assignment but you could find the answers in the back of the book. I wasn’t learning. I was just doing the work and because I did all of the work I got passing grades. So I’m wrestling with this idea of grading and it comes up in every professional learning (session) that I offer for teachers. They always want to know what the answer is and I don’t have one. So I can present them with the research and the different ways that are out there but I’m still trying to figure that one out, I think.

C: Hamilton High School just has gone, this year, to standards-based grading.

K: So we were…when I was at Hamilton 5 years ago we started the conversation talking about that and that’s when my mind…when you asked me about mentorship and leadership, my principal there and the curriculum director, is Barb Ferguson still there?

C: I don’t know.

K: And I know Doug is not the principal anymore.

C: Right.

K: So David Tebow, who is the superintendent…

C: He still is.

K: …came in…his first year was my first year there as well and that conversation started and we were investigating and we were looking into it so that’s when I started implementing some of these things in my classroom for the first time. Grading based on mastery of standards and so we had rubrics for every standard and students had time to get there. It might take me a week longer than it takes you and that was okay. We were starting to play with that. This is what I loved about Hamilton. They take time to implement things. So we started that conversation when I was there and that was 5 or 6 years ago and you’re saying they just now…

C: They instituted it, I think, two years ago in the middle school and got the community, at least the middle school parents, up to speed because the other thing…

K: That’s the other thing…

C: …now you’re getting 1 through 4 instead of (a letter grade or percentage) but they had some kind of calculator to turn it into a percentage for college…

K: It’s a grade.

C: But now the high school is really…you know, like, “How’s this going to work?” and it’s not, the person I interviewed there, it’s not that the rubrics aren’t clear, but it’s just that shift, the mindset shift that’s causing that little bit of…

K: So is one of your teachers at Hamilton? Did I teach with that person?

C: She’s Pam Wilkins now. She was Pam Spitzley.

K: Social Studies teacher?

C: Yep.

K: Has she been there a long time?

C: Since 2008.

K: So she was there when I was there so that shows how separate the alternative program was. (32:23) We were in a trailer out in front of the middle school campus. We weren’t even on the high school grounds.

C: Ok.

K: So even though we were high school teachers we were in portables outside of the middle school so…

C: Yeah. I think she was volleyball coach for a while. (for the middle school)

K: Ok.

C: I don’t know if she is still coaching. In fact I don’t think she is.

K: Interesting. But yeah, that grading conversation. I know I would definitely make some changes in how I did it. I know I am helping my teachers think through their own personal philosophies of grading right now and what’s important. In the district I’m at they have a very old-fashioned grading policy. This percentage is homework. This percentage is tests. This percentage is quizzes and it’s district-wide. So everyone’s looks the same. So it is difficult to talk about changing that especially in the situation that we are in, but I am just wrestling with the idea of, “What are we really accomplishing by grading students the way that I graded them?” Right?

C: Right.

K: Because you could also have the student who fails your class, who really knew all the stuff but didn’t put in the effort so what…it’s such a balance…and I don’t know the answer yet but that’s something that over the next couple of years it’s going to be part of my work here.

C: My oldest grandson, who is a senior out in North Dakota, when he was living in Nebraska, he was in an ungraded middle school and it was all based on mastery. And the sad thing is, number one, he moved, but even within the school district, after the middle school, they went back to the old traditional set-up in the high school and as he was getting close to the end of his second year there, he came to me as, like a 7th grader and he said, “Grandpa, I’m not sure about this because I can go at my own speed…” and here’s a 7th grader saying this, “…I can go at my own speed and get things done and I don’t feel pressure, but I really want, it’s easy to see what I have to do but what happens when I go back to the high school?” And I said, “Alec, you got me, buddy.”

K: I know. I feel like it’s a conversation that needs to start happening more but I think that it is. Every conference that I have been to in the last couple of years, there’s always been a speaker on grading and assessment and we are such a high stakes testing culture but grading and feedback have to be separate from that. That’s what is happening in our buildings and our classrooms and so I think we can do better. And that’s something that I know I would have worked at in the classroom to change and I’m working with my teachers to really think about their practices but something that I definitely want to learn more about so I can be better at this conversation.

C: Right.

K: Than I am right now.

C: Anything else in strategies and methods? I mean you’ve covered a pretty wide gamut there.

K: Yeah. I would definitely do more project-based learning.

C: Yeah.

K: It wasn’t until Hamilton that I had the opportunity to learn a lot about that and so that is a lot of the work that I have done. Most of my training has been through the [Buck Institute](http://bie.org/for/teachers) for project based learning. So I run project-based learning cohorts through the Pontiac School District, which is a lot of fun, so I get to take teachers for five days they come and for five days we do a real in-depth look at the process and when they leave they have a project that they are going to implement in their classroom but because we are doing it in a cohort manner than we wrap back around and so then we have a day where we come back together and we reflect and we talk and so really building in the professional learning community. (35:55) It’s been fun to watch the changes happening in the district because of some of those things. As a teacher, myself, I started doing that in Hamilton and I was doing a version of it when I was in Zeeland and Allendale, but I think it would be really fun to implement it knowing what I know now.

C: Now I know that some of the teachers and I might have been one of those at one point in my career, started to get interested in project-based learning more than traditional but then I said, “I can’t cover all the content that I am being held to…”

K: Right.

C: And I know with the new Social Studies standards coming out some teachers have said, “Well, there is still too much that we have cover based on how we want to cover it” because more and more teachers that I see, where our students are placed, are becoming more and more non-traditional. I mean there’s hardly any teachers who use all direct instruction anymore. But the trade-off with project-based learning, it’s not that “inch deep, mile long” (approach).

K: Right. You go deep on that content and so I think, taking it back to the technology, because we have a lot to cover, right, but we have to decide as a collaborate group of Social Studies teachers, I know that’s a lot of the work that they are doing at the ISD level. So some of my colleagues, like Amy Bloom and Stacey Woodward and those folks, Darren Stockdale, I don’t know if you know Dr. Stockdale.

C: I know the name.

K: They are working on…ok, so we have to cover it…these are the new standards but what is going to be the most meaningful way to really go deep on some of these things. So you can go deep on a small piece of a standard and in the project students are still accessing that other information. Because the truth is, when we graduate from high school, we don’t remember everything that we learned.

C: Right.

K: I’m the perfect example of that. So I was a history teacher and I still struggled talking about dates and things that happened but I know how to access and interpret that information and make it meaningful for other people. So helping our students through project-based learning really investigate and go deep on things that are interesting to them and be able to relate it back (to their lives)… So I talked about successful teaching… They can talk about why they are doing something in their classroom and they go home and they are excited about it, and want to keep talking about it. Most of the time you will see, because you can still give a summative test at the end, you will see that they learned that content. Right? They just learned it in a really different way. (I remember Diane McGrath giving me a hard time for giving my students a summative, traditional assessment after I taught the content and skills through project-based learning. She said students should be assessed in the same manner in which they are taught.) Does that help?

C: Well, yeah. In part, one of the projects I did for my doctoral work I actually got “dinged” by my, in a good way, in a positive way, by my major advisor because we did this, we did project-based learning and then I went back and gave a summative, multiple choice, fill in the blank, not fill in the blank (and essay test) and she said, “Why?”

K: Sure.

C: And I said, “What do you mean?” And she said, “You had very good rubrics for your project. The students were successful. Based on all the evidence you provided why wasn’t that your summative assessment?” And I looked at her like, “Because I’m not used to doing that.”

K: Right. And the truth is in some districts, you are still required to give that summative assessment.

C: Right. Common.

K: Right. Common summative assessments and that’s true in the district that I am in now. So working with teachers to still develop their projects in this culture of inquiry-based learning and still passing those summative assessments at the end. So they are still “covering”, right, all the standards, but they are really going deep and the students can leave the classroom feeling like they have something meaningful to talk about and not just that they, like when I used to prepare for a history test, I had my stack of flashcards and I memorized everything and then I would see it on the test and then when I turned it was kind of out of my brain. Until I had to learn the next set of whatever it was. I mean I was that student. So I get that. I know if I would have had a different experience in high school…this was what I was talking with my husband about last night…if I would have been graded different and I would have had this inquiry-based (learning), I might not have gotten the same grades that I got, but I might have learned more. So I don’t know.

C: And the funny thing is, in that summative test that I gave for that project-based thing, the class met mastery, which my advisor did not…because she was pushing… “You should evaluate or test the way you teach.” But then I said, “The results showed that they learned better and there wasn’t a standard Bell curve. Everything was shoved to the positive side.”

K: Right, because they were engaged with the content.

C: So we had a long discussion about that. Because, like you said, it was holding in the memory.

K: So I would love to go back and do it myself. The fun thing is now that I do professional development and have these opportunities for teachers, I always structure my PD in a project-based learning model. So we start with an “entry event”. I’ve got one coming up in October and I’m using an 8th grade middle school math project as the example so they are going to be in teams of 8th graders and we just dive right in to make it more authentic for them so they can see what that is like for their students. So, that’s fun. I wish I could do it with students more but a lot of times I get to go in and do it alongside the teachers.

C: Well, that’s good too.

K: That’s fun.

C: Because you want to see it in practice. Question #6: And please bring in your career here, what types of evaluations, both informal and formal, are used to assess your classroom teaching and how are these evaluations used to better your teaching? (41:35) And just to provide some context background for this, it has been all over the spectrum because some of the people so far in the study have said, “I use my classroom assessments that my students do. It’s the main way that I reflect upon my teaching and then the principal comes in.” In their mindset, “Ok, I have to do well when they show up, but it is what I am learning from what the kids are showing me on the assessment that really matters.” So where do you sit in that? I am assuming that you are still being evaluated.

K: So, yes, I am. It’s a different kind of evaluation now. I went back. I really thought about how this has changed over the course of my career. When I was first in the classroom, I would say my first five years of teaching, I had very little evaluations from my principals unless it was a formal, scheduled, you know those observations you have to have every year and I think because of that disconnect I felt the same thing (student assessments were her evaluations). I felt like, “Ok, you have got to put on the show” when this person comes in because that is what everything is based on and the truth is sometimes they wouldn’t even stay for the whole time or, and it didn’t feel meaningful because we would have a kind of conversation but it would never go very deep and then it would be, “Ok, sign the paper. It’s filed. Your evaluation is filed.” It wasn’t like…we’re coming back to Hamilton…it wasn’t until I got to Hamilton where I had an administrator who really took that feedback loop really seriously and so you wouldn’t know when Mr. Braschler was going to walk into your classroom. You didn’t know how long he was going to stay. But no matter how long he was there for, whether it was for 5 minutes or the full hour, he always found time to have a conversation with you about it. He pushed us professionally. He got us to think bigger. He got us to…stuff I had never experienced before with an administrator and I don’t remember what type of evaluation I had the first couple of years. At Hamilton we actually had a conversation about it so we were using the Danielson “Four Domains of Teaching”…4, 5?... domains of teaching and that was our evaluation. We actually had meetings about it. We had conversations about it and it was an authentic thing that we were using. Now, and you asked how I assessed teaching, so I used the assessments, both summative and formative that I had in my class. At the end of the year I always asked my students to reflect and I would use that. If I were to go back and do it again, (-24:02) I would do that much more consistently throughout the year and have the same feedback loop that I was craving from an administrator, I would want to have with my students, knowing how powerful that feedback can be. Because they know better than anyone, “Did this lesson work? Tell me why?” But I think when you are first starting out, it’s just a matter of “Ok, now I have to move on to this. I’ve got to get to the next day.” So you don’t think to step back and really talk to students and project-based learning has taught me that too because you really take time to reflect, both as a student and as a professional on what worked and what didn’t work and you do it at multiple stages throughout the project. That is something I would definitely change. Now, in my role, I’m providing a lot of on-going feedback to teachers and it’s mostly informal. It’s mostly classroom observation and then I always, based on what I learned from a really great leader that I had, I always find time to have that conversation. If I can’t find that time to have that conversation that’s an email that goes to them about the great things that I saw and some things to think about. And teachers, now over the course of 3 years that we have really developed relationships, teachers will come to me and say, “What do you think about this lesson?” or, “I’ve got this group of students. I don’t know what to do.” And so I am providing feedback in that way. And I’m also part of the formal Priority Schools Team that we do walk-throughs quarterly and I actually have to fill out the state reporting but to me that’s just not as meaningful. It’s those state forms and those state mandates.

C: Back to compliance.

K: It feels like compliance.

C: Right.

K: Right. What I am seeing in our district is just what we talked about. Our administrators, our building level administrators, are being pulled in so many directions that these teachers that need it just as much as anyone, if not more, are getting the informal, the walk-throughs, the formative assessment. They are just getting the scheduled observations and we sign them and they get filed and I don’t know. That could definitely be better. But I don’t blame the administrators. There is no time.

C: It’s like, “Ok, we invented this monster but now we are not funding the man hours, the woman hours to make it work correctly.”

K: Right.

C: Do it on a shoestring and do it poorly. You don’t have to agree with me if you don’t agree.

K: I do agree with you. I do agree. I think both in teaching with the students and administrator to teacher and even teacher to teacher, when talking a lot, I try to start instructional rounds with the teachers, even just within our school district or within a building and I couldn’t get the sub funding to do it. But even the teacher-to-teacher feedback, if it’s focused on a strategy, not just, “Hey, 5 kids were sleeping in the back” but if we’re focused on the strategy we are using today, trying to get something like that started but unless it’s me in the classroom right now or the coaches, we have a lot of contact coaches, that are contractors, that are state-mandated, but are good people who are coming in to help, the feedback from the administrators, which I think is the feedback they are craving, we just don’t get. I don’t know if I answered your question. I think I did.

C: Yeah, you did. So in the process then, going back to Hamilton, that was the best example because you got the feedback.

K: Yes.

C: And it was meaningful and authentic.

K: It was meaningful and authentic. And like I said if he was there for 5 minutes or if he stayed for the full hour, even if he couldn’t sit down and have a conversation with you, you would get an email or you would find a note in your mailbox. There was always a connection to what you were doing and you felt supported. You felt supported but he would also bring up really great things like, “Have you thought about…?” or “You should go talk to this teacher because I saw this really cool thing that I think would work for you.” We had this constant communication going that wasn’t just, “Oh, it’s your time of year for your observation. I’m going to be here. Make sure everything is perfect.” Right? Because that is what it felt like. (If observations were not conducted as a form of positive feedback and communication.)

C: The work case in the 28 years before I came to Grand Valley was a couple of years all I got was a checklist and it was, “Sign this” and it was literally just a checklist.

K: Without conversation or…

C: “Sign this off and I’ve fulfilled my duty to evaluate you and don’t you like these checks?”

K: Right. And so now evaluations are even more…I mean, what is the “reaching…proficient…what is it? “Almost?” That’s what teacher evaluations are.

C: “Highly…”

K: Highly…

C: Highly proficient.

K: So I didn’t have that as a classroom teacher. That changed after I was no longer in the classroom but I just…I don’t know. I don’t know that we are doing it right. I don’t think that we are. I take that back. I don’t think the evaluation tool matters as much as what the administrator does with the evaluation tool.

C: And that keys in with what a lot of people said.

K: Yeah.

C: Because no matter what the tool, some schools are on Danielson, some are starting to move to Marzano but the consistent thing I’m getting is so far is it’s the feedback and the conversation around the evaluation. It’s not the tool itself and then who’s doing it?

K: And the ability for the administrator to be that instructional leader and be able to, and if not be able to offer some support on the specific thing that that you are doing, be able to point you to a resource that does. Just having that toolkit (as an administrator and instructional leader). Rather than just checking the boxes. I don’t think the tool matters as much as what that administrator is doing with it.

C: Right. That feeds into what other people have said. What types of mentoring were provided for you and how would you characterize the results of that mentoring that was provided for you?

K: So I thought about both my undergrad and graduate school I had professors, a couple, that I can remember. So in undergrad school it was you because you were always able to listen to us or provide feedback or we could call and you would talk to us. It was that relationship piece but then I keep going to feedback, also giving that feedback. “Have you thought about…?” And then in graduate school I was really lucky to have a couple of administrators who were currently in the job who when we were thinking about issues (50:16) or even when I was at Oakland Schools, I actually was in an administrative position, I could call them and they were happy to talk you through things or decision-making or…so I just felt really lucky to have that. Principal-wise I didn’t have a great mentor until I got to Hamilton, which I talked about. Something that I think we could really get better at, I always had a mentor/teacher.

C: You did.

K: Always had a mentor/teacher but all I ever learned from my mentor/teacher was how to put in for substitutes, what time is lunch, when is the best time to go to the copy machine, so practical things that you need to know, but it was never about growing as a professional or growing as a teacher.

C: The minutiae but not the “meat”.

K: Umm, hmm. And that was true, even at Hamilton. I had a mentor/teacher but it was all about…and I know why…as a teacher you already have so much on your plate. So I don’t know if there is a way that schools can start thinking about restructuring that a different way or if it comes from the college. I don’t know. And maybe someone else has had a great teacher/mentor experience where you actually sit down and talk about instruction and growth and learning but that didn’t happen with my mentor/teachers. And I just mentioned that my current supervisor is another great leader and mentor that I am able to work for. He is really great at the feedback and the listening, but also really great at pushing when he knows that you can do more. Or that you can think bigger. Or, “Hey, I really want you to be at this in a couple of months because this is important for your career or for what you can impact students with” so I’ve really appreciated that.

C: So real expectations but maybe challenges that are also real.

K: Yeah. And I think the same thing when I think about my principal at Hamilton. There were, it felt like real expectations. Like, “I can walk into your classroom at anytime and it’s ok if it’s a little chaotic because these are the things I am looking for.” We were always aware. I don’t think that’s always true.

C: Right. No, it isn’t.

K: I don’t think teachers always know.

C: No. I know.

K: And then the mentor/teachers thing, I think that could be powerful, because you want that when you are a first, second, third year teacher, you want that, and you find that person, usually, that you can go to, and it might not be your mentor/teacher but…

C: It isn’t.

K: Yeah. But, at least in my experience, the one that was assigned to me was always about practical (problems), which is helpful, you need to know those things. But it was never…once you are in your classroom you are kind of on your own. Unless you reached out and found that support.

C: But I mean that creates a “silo” thing too because if you don’t have an instructional leader who believes it is a team and you don’t have a department that believes it’s a team, then you have a problem because then it’s more separation, “I’ll do my job. Leave me alone. I don’t have time to deal with this.” And that’s not good for the school.

K: Right. This is feeling negative.

C: No. No, it isn’t.

K: Are you sure?

C: Yep. Question #8: I know this is true. You have continued your education. You have your Master’s.

K: Yep.

C: And you are a Professional Development person now.

K: I am.

C: So you can expound on this: How has this education influenced your success in the classroom?

K: My Master’s is in Educational Leadership. My focus was Curriculum and Instruction and then I got my K-12 Principal’s certification, so I have that. My professional development that I had when I was in the classroom, I didn’t realize it until I got into a district like Hamilton, but the professional development that I had while I was in Allendale and Zeeland, it always felt like very…we would like one day where we would talk about great classroom management strategies but then we would never go back to it. Or we had this one day in Zeeland where they put us on school buses and they took us to manufacturing places around the city so we could talk to business leaders about what they were looking for in students which was a great idea but we never did anything with that or went back to it. So those types of experiences have helped me now as a professional development leader to know that on-going feedback loop and the idea of a cohort and actually coming back and reflecting on what you are doing is so important. And then when I got to Hamilton, they did it right. We had a formative assessment professional development that lasted for an entire year (similar to the process that Circle went through when studying about changing to a Block Schedule). That’s all we did. Any time we met in a PLC, any time we had a full teacher development day, any of those things, it was always focused around formative assessment. We were doing a book study together, as a staff, having conversation around it. So that was one of the best professional learning opportunities that I had. I had project based learning training. I had technology integration training, just through different conferences in a 3 day thing here and a 5 thing here, that I kind of pieced together. And now that I am in my position here as a consultant in the ISD, part of our work is to still be participating in professional learning opportunities. And it’s a little different for me because I’m imbedded in a district but the expectation is, I believe, that you attend two in-state and one out of state (PDs) every year conference to go, and what I’m saying about staying on top of the best strategies and tools and programs, we go out there and try to learn as much as we can about everything and then we come back and kind of synthesize with our colleagues and then decide, “Ok, what is it that we are going to offer to the 28 districts in Oakland County?” So, because I’ve been imbedded in a district I haven’t been doing that as much. I would say that I have been presenting more than I’ve been able to be a participant in the past couple of years. If that does change next year and I am at the county level I’ll have the opportunity to do that. (56:12) I’m participating again in the state Social Studies Conference this year so I’m excited about that. I’m presenting on blended instruction in Social Studies, is what they asked me to do. But all of that, it goes back, it feels like it’s all pieced together but that’s how my career has been. It did this at the end (she folded her fingers together in a meshing action) and landed me right to here. So I’m still figuring out how that all fits together and making my plan for moving forward. What do I really want to bring and what can I offer to teachers?

C: I think the key is, and I think that’s a common…not just by the teachers in the study…in general. “One and done PD”, they might be able to take one thing away…

K: Yeah, it’s tough.

C: …but without having the feedback, the loop to continue, then it’s “Ok, that was great. Now let’s go on to something else. What’s coming down the bend next week or next month or next year?”

K: Or it’s easy to forget about it because the reality is when you get back to your classroom, who knows what is happening there? Homecoming, assembly or whatever it might be that…right, it would be real easy…

C: I’ve been to two assemblies during this (research) too.

K: Right. Ours is happening today at Pontiac, which is why we are not meeting over there. Today is Homecoming. It is real easy to forget about that and then you are just caught up in ‘whatever’ but if you’re doing something that is consistent and you’re in a cohort or you’re in an instructional series or you’re being able to continue having that conversation with your colleagues I think it can be a lot more meaningful. I have learned that throughout the process and I’m excited about the opportunity to now provide that for teachers. Maybe in a way that I didn’t get.

C: One of the things that, I mean PD is all over the spectrum, and I have had some teachers tell me that they just love what they are getting out of their ISD, on both ends of the state and north and south. The other ones, two or three of them have said, “We are doing our PD in-house. We may get the lead from the consultant at the ISD but then our peers are presenting and there is a lot better engagement because…

K: From our peers.

C: …we are hearing from somebody down the hall.

K: So we are definitely transitioning to that here. A lot of our districts are doing a lot more district-provided professional development. For a lot of reasons, that’s one of the reasons. Another one is just the issue of getting substitute teachers and pulling people out of class if they do out of district provided day, teachers are all there. But that’s a conversation we have a lot here. “How can we support that transition as that is starting to happen because less people are coming…although the building is filled today…but less people are coming here for PD and it’s happening more within the districts, which is great! I love the idea of teacher leadership or administrative led (PD), because then you have more buy-in too.

C: Right.

K: So I think we will continue to support both here. We’re also considering moving into blended professional development for teachers. That’s a transition, as well, that I’m going to help with here. After Pontiac though.

C: So you’re going to be podcasting yourself?

K: I don’t know. There’s a studio. You can do it.

C: “Pearls of Wisdom”. (-8:10) Here you go. If you didn’t expound before. What would you tell current students to make sure they know before they start teaching, in other words, and you have offered lots of things before the recording started and during, what do you wish you knew before you left GVSU to start your career?

K: When I first did this I felt really negative. When I first wrote this list and so I…and I don’t want to tell new teachers like, but I do feel like we do need a little bit of a reality check so I would say to be a really good teacher that really cares it takes a lot of work. A lot of time. So my advice on that would be to really find the ways that you can do that work and do it well but still take time for yourself. I think that’s really important. So first making sure, “Am I really prepared for this job that doesn’t turn itself off, ever, even over the summer, if I’m going to do it right.” And, secondly, “How am I going to deal with that and manage it?” That’s something that I am still definitely working on. The other one is that unless you reach out to your colleagues, and really start building those teams on your own, it can be a really lonely job and so I think it’s really important, and I don’t know if we were told that, how important it is to collaborate and lean on other teachers. Sometimes I think you feel like when you are the new person in the building, you don’t want to pester other people, they’ve got (their things to do), they’re busy, but the truth is if we don’t collaborate and work together, we shut our doors and we’re back in those ‘silos’ and that’s not productive for anyone. So I think that’s important. I didn’t realize as a student. I was going out to change the world and I was going to be this great teacher, I didn’t realize how political the job is.

C: Oh, boy! This has come up multiple times about (in-school or in-district politics) and now I’m beginning to think that we’re going to have to put that into the curriculum, into the syllabus, the politics of school.

K: It was a real reality check. You know you hear every day about schools failing and the charters and the breaking of teachers’ unions and you get into a school and you’re told to join the teacher’s union and you’re told to not join the teachers’ union…I mean it’s just that there is politics and it’s different in every district and there are things that are common in every district that I had no idea about when walking in the door. And then my last one is despite all that is that it still can be a really, really rewarding job. Just like yesterday, getting a tweet from a former student who is out in Chicago being a graphic designer and just a couple of weeks ago getting an email from another one who’s in Washington, D.C. She just got what she calls her “dream job” (-5:57) in social media, out working in D.C. so it can still be really rewarding but you just need to be prepared for all that other stuff, because we just want it to be all about the kids and what’s happening in the classroom and there is so many and there is so many, so much more than that in a school and in education. And I talked about too, the disparity. I wasn’t prepared for that when I left Grand Valley.

C: And even with the (two “diverse” placements)…well, you’re right. West Ottawa and Allendale (her two placements), even though West Ottawa is definitely more diverse than Allendale, it’s still not, what you would consider, the most challenged school in Grand Rapids and no where close to Detroit…

K: Right.

C: Or Chicago, or Baltimore or Boston.

K: And then I don’t know where this fits into undergrad education either but I didn’t truly have an understanding of the state system of support (5:02) and the idea of MyExcel Schools and Priority Schools and what all that means and I guess that goes back to the politics of it. And maybe you don’t need to have an understanding unless you are in one of those districts but the truth is you could be working along in your district great and then something happens and you’re laid off and then you end up in another one of these districts and you still have those kids who need you.

C: Yeah.

K: But your life is so different. And so I don’t know. Just as someone who has experienced that, I wasn’t prepared for it. I adapted.

C: Well, yeah.

K: So.

C: But it would have been good to have a ‘heads up’ before you actually jumped into it.

K: I think so.

C: Yeah.

K: But then we talked about, maybe that’s bad because people would (not want to go into teaching).

C: You have to…I mean, there’s got to be a balance because you could…like I said, I could have told horror stories through even what I saw in the two different school districts that I taught (in).

K: Right.

C: That would drive people out because we didn’t want to deal with guys coming in with shotguns and things like that and especially with what happened at the community college in Oregon yesterday.

K: Right.

C: But, at the same time, “Ok, here’s the reality and every community has politics. Politics is everywhere. So now how are you going to deal with that that is effective and doesn’t hurt your kids and that’s hard.

K: I think, so we talked about Allendale and West Ottawa. West Ottawa is definitely diverse and probably has become more diverse. There is a difference between the diversity and then the economic disparity and I think I’m talking…so the diversity, that’s fine. The diversity is what it is. What I’m talking about is the economic disparity between districts and even within a district sometimes between school buildings.

C: Yeah. Oh, definitely.

K: So, that was something that I don’t know if I was prepared for. Or maybe you’re not prepared for it. I was just shocked by it when I experienced it for the first time.

C: And one of the principals in this study, he just started this last school year in Grand Ledge and when he was still teaching in the middle school in Grand Ledge he had a Michigan State intern for a whole year and he said…he (the Grand Ledge principal) was in a middle school in Grand Rapids Public, that socio-economic, really poverty area and all that stuff and he said, not that there isn’t some poverty issues in Grand Ledge but this MSU student just had one classroom for the whole year and maybe got to know Grand Ledge really well but then didn’t have the two different placements to get a picture of what’s going on.

K: Right. I know at Oakland University and I only know this because my little sister is in the Elementary Ed program…she’s in her student teaching year now. She’s in the last year. They…so we didn’t…if I’m remembering correctly now…we didn’t enter the College of Education until…

C: the fifth year.

K: Right. So I was at Grand Valley for four and a half years but it was at the end. So we didn’t enter the College of Education until the end. They…she had to take her certification test…maybe that wasn’t right away but she had to do something and she entered the College of Education kind of at the beginning and they have had, she has been in a school district every year that she has been at OU and it’s been a different placement every time. So it might be, one semester she’s two days a week or one day a week drop in and now she’s at the point where she’s full student teaching but for us we didn’t get that experience until the very end and so other universities they are in it right at the beginning and I think they do that because you might get in it and think, “Wow! I need to change my path.”

C: Right.

K: Whereas, with us, if you didn’t like it, you have already spent four years in college.

C: Yeah. What are you going to do now?

K: It’s kind of problematic. But I know that’s common. I know that’s how a lot of schools do it.

C: Right. And there’s plenty of schools out there that still do one 8 week student teaching. No teacher assisting.

K: Right. That’s right we did teacher assisting for a semester and then student teaching for a semester?

C: Yeah.

K: That’s how we did it and those were the two different placements.

C: Well, you loaded my plate, thank you very much, Kim.

K: You’re welcome.

C: Anything else under “Pearls of Wisdom”?

K: I don’t think so.

C: How about #10?

K: So I had some listed but we have talked about them all.

C: Oh, you’re sure?

K: I integrated them in. Yeah. Do you have any other?

C: No. I…

K: I’m looking. I think I got it all.

C: Well, you know, take some time.

K: I’m just happy to see you again.

C: Well, I am too.

K: I still talk about when you gave us pizza at your house.

C: I still do it.

K: You do?

C: Yeah. Of course I do.

K: That’s so nice. That’s so nice.

C: I like doing it.

K: Yeah. That’s it.

C: Thank you Kim.

K: Thank you.