Brian Zalud May 19 2015

Ovid-Elsie Middle School

C: It is May 19th 2015. I’m with Brian Zalud at Ovid-Elsie Middle School. He’s in the same classroom he was before in 2008 which is the only one so far in the study.

B: Yep.

C: So other people have been in the same school and taught different subjects and things like that. So starting right off, Brian, how do you define success in teaching and then the second part of that question, do you believe GVSU prepared you for success in the classroom?

B: I think for me success in teaching is developing the relationships with the kids and, like when you just walked through with me in the high school, having kids who were willing to yell your name out and like come to see you and they want that connection and that bond because for a lot of the kids that I teach 8th grade history is not that important, but having an adult in their life that cares about them is (important) knowing that if something is going on at home. My father had a stroke last year, the same weekend that I had a kid that had one and we kind of went through that process together and he’s even a freshman and he’ll talk to me about what his dad is doing in recovery versus what mine is and knowing that that kid knows I cared about him and he cared about me, that, to me, is success. If they remember the branches of government, that’s awesome, but if they know somebody cared about them, I think that’s better. I think Grand Valley definitely prepared me academically and for the actual classroom itself. I don’t think you can ever do enough to actually prepare somebody to take over a classroom because when you actually get it, it’s yours. There’s going to be obstacles and things that you haven’t even thought about, but I think compared to talking to other kids from other schools and other teachers I’ve met the program that I had to go through at Grand Valley was much more extensive than a lot of the other schools. So I thought, coming in, I talked to kids who went to Michigan State, “we did 10 weeks” (in the classroom). Well, I did a full year and I just felt more ready to tackle it than I think they were.

C: And that’s the comment I’ve received in the 2008 study from administrators and other teachers from around the United States and around the state of Michigan so that’s good. I mean it’s good for you and it speaks to the fact that you’ve been successful and you’re still teaching and all of that too.

B: It’s kind of bad that you go for a 5 year program instead of 4 but I think in the long-run it’s worth it. I mean, other than the challenges you’re going to have with Kid A and Kid B that you’ve never had to deal with before but that’s going to happen Year 30 teaching so than that I thought they did a good job.

C: What have been the biggest challenges to your career?

B: Challenges…I’d like to say I really didn’t have any.

C: You can say what you want to, Brian.

B: I got lucky. I feel like I’m in a great school. I feel like I needed anything if I ask my administrator I’m going to get it. I’d say we went through a stretch where we really didn’t have an administrator for a while because we shared one with the high school and a lot of stuff was dumped on teachers for us to have to do that maybe an administrator should have been responsible for, but I think that just made us better in the long run. I mean at the time, it was awful when we were coming up with schedules and we’re figuring out where to put kids and dealing with discipline problems and us having to do it but I think long term I want to get into administration so I think that’s going to help me 10 years down the road or whatever so…

C: Did you get any release time for that? Or were you teaching your “full boat” and doing all that?

B: (Shook his head, yes, that he was teaching full time and doing that).

C: Holy Cow!

B: The guy who was the science teacher, who is now the principal at one of the elementaries, he was like the main guy.

C: Ok.

B: So if anything happened they went to him but I told him, “You’re getting overwhelmed. Let me help you and I’ll do this and this”, especially the group of 8th graders we had that year were rather challenging. They just weren’t a good group for class…I’m trying to look for the word here, like “likeness”. They weren’t even nice to each other. They were just mean kids. So we had a lot of issues that we had to deal with and it just…we didn’t have a real principal. We shared (with) the high school and we had to deal with it ourselves. So I’d say that’s been our biggest challenge. [He didn’t say, “my biggest challenge” but “our biggest challenge”. Recognizes that success means working together as a staff and not as an individual.]

C: Ok. What methods have you adopted to deal with stresses in your career?

B: Ping pong at lunch.

C: Saw that.

B: Ping pong at lunch is fun and I think that we’re pretty lucky that we have a relatively young group of teachers that all get along and we go outside together, outside to golf and we’ll go, there’s a restaurant in town that has a local “wing” night and we will all go together and get wings and kind of openly complain about kids, but not to the point where it’s negative. It’s just, “this kid is doing this. Is he doing it for you and how do I deal with it?”

C: Ok, like cooperative then?

B: Yeah, it starts off almost like a whining and complaining session. “Is he doing it in your room? No? What are you doing? How is it different?” It’s never gotten negative and I think it works really well for us. (5:23)

C: That’s a good environment, culture to be in.

B: Yeah. Like I told you, I make fun of the science teacher and tell her she’s like the wizard teacher of potions and ask kids if they turned anything into a frog today and stuff. They just know we get along and we have fun. We really don’t have anybody on the staff that is like the outcast. Everybody kind of deals together and I know talking to other teachers, our elementary building and our high school building, it’s not that way and it’s almost venomous to the building. They don’t get along. They don’t like each other. Personally I think that’s just an elementary teacher thing, but maybe it’s not. I don’t know.

C: Yeah, it’s interesting that you mention that because the teacher in Richmond that I’ve already talked to, she said she was in an ISD area-wide thing and Ithaca is in that mix so she is talking to a Social Studies teacher from Ithaca High School and he said, “I don’t even know the people across the hall from me.” And she said, “How can that work?” And he said, “Well, we just close our doors and do our thing on our own.” And she said, “I couldn’t even relate to that comment because so much of what we do (at Richmond Middle School) is together.”

B: I need that lunch time, even though it’s only 30 minutes, I need that to be around other people to re-set yourself because you might have that morning where 2nd Hour is just awful and the kids are just off the wall and you don’t get that de-stress time to come in with a new…you want to give every kid the clean slate every time so you don’t take issues from 2nd to 3rd to 4th hour and I think that’s one of the things that go into the stress thing…you’ve got to find a way to get it off your back.

C: A few already, and I think you are only the 6th or 7th so far that I’ve interviewed, said they have a planned work-out. They make sure they are running, biking, lifting, whatever. Is that part of your regime too?

B: Yeah. Three of us in the morning get together at school, about 6 o’clock we start and we’ll do an “insanity” or P90X or something like that and on Friday mornings a bunch of the teachers get together and we play basketball and we do something to relieve stress, run it off, lift it off, whatever it might take.

C: How do you keep motivated? What motivates you to be the best teacher you can be?

B: I just like being here.

C: That’s a great answer.

B: I don’t know. I like the relationships I have with the kids. I like how I can do the give and take and you saw some of that today with the girl, “I hate your class.” And I, “Aw, your brother was a better student.” (All in jest.) But it’s fun. I don’t think I take it so serious where, especially at the middle school, what they do here, I’m not going to keep anybody out of college. I’m not going to keep somebody from getting a job. I’m hopefully teaching them skills that will help them in the future, but it’s not like, “Ok, this kid’s failing my class so that means he is going to have to come back again and again and again.” So I think this is one of the last years they get to see teachers in a positive role because I know there’s a lot of kids that struggle, they don’t care, they don’t want to be here and they get to have fun still, I think. And I think I try to do things that make it entertaining. The book I have in class is the same book I had 9 years ago. It’s the same book I went to middle school with. I use it maybe once a month. I find stuff online. I have Chromebooks for all the kids so I have challenges to keep me motivate, try to find things to make me better.

C: And from my memory, even though you might have used the textbook more when I was here in 2008, I think you have always reached out to find different sources to use with the kids.

B: I Google things. If I can find somebody out there who is smarter than me and better than me I’m going to steal their stuff. (Not really “steal” but rather borrow their ideas.) Because why not? When you were here today I was using iCivics. I can’t make that webquest. I can’t put that sheet together. I don’t have the time. I’m coaching two sports. I’m trying to be married and enjoy that life so I want to leave here and not work until 10 o’clock at night because you can’t.

C: No, you can’t.

B: And if you do you’re going to burn out.

C: Yep.

B: And I hate to say that because I know there’s a lot of people who do that but that’s not who I want to be.

C: Yeah, and I talk to my students about trying to find balance because I’m worried about them. I mean the stats aren’t good and that’s the good thing about…even though this pool is small…so few of you have left teaching that there’s got to be something going on that leads to that.

B: I think the other really nice thing is no matter what topic you are covering in Social Studies, I don’t know what it’s like for Language Arts and Math, but if you take whatever your topic is and you Google that topic with “lesson” and “pdf” you’re going to find something…it might not be good…but it might be enough where you can use it one year and then adapt and change it the next year or find another. There’s always something out there. There’s government agencies. There’s university students who are putting projects together that (10:36) put them online, so, I mean, I won’t do it the morning of an assignment but I know if we are going to be talking about Reconstruction, I’ll Google it and see what I can find that is better than what I’ve got.

C: Right.

B: And like, I’ve got, I don’t know if I showed you, that’s like every assignment I give kids (he showed me a 3 ring binder full of assignments). I keep them all because I want to know what did I use last year, what worked what didn’t, what was good, what sucked, what do I have to throw away and I go through every couple years and clean it out and that’s just the Internet print offs. That’s not computer files because I can print those whenever I want to.

C: Right, sure.

B: But that’s being 9 years in the same room has made me able to do that. I hadn’t had to change.

C: And that’s the question I get from my current students. I tell them the first couple of years are going to be tough. So they say, “When is it going to get easier?” And I said, “Well, maybe after the second or third year but it depends on what you are calling “easier” because there is still going to be a lot of time and effort put into it.”

B: I never wanted to…because I had those teachers in high school that in 1970 they gave the same handout that they did in 2000. If something is great I will use it every year but I want to adapt it. I want to change it. And maybe last year we spent 3 weeks on the Civil War. This year we spent 2. Like, we have to pre-test, post-test kids so I have to constantly change my lessons and what I’m doing because they might understand something but there might be another topic that the year before got but these kids don’t get so it’s…So that might even be the biggest challenge too, is all this pre-test, post-testing and the learning targets and all this stuff you have to come up with now. It’s crazy sometimes but it’s fun.

C: What changes, if any, have occurred in the strategies and methods you use in your classroom?

B: I thought when I started I used a lot of technology and I was good at it. We use way more now. The “Schoology” the kids are on, the Chromebooks the kids get. Our administrator almost basically said, if you are not willing to adapt to technology he doesn’t want you. That’s just the way it’s going to be, these kids now are connected. Social media is huge. Every kid has a phone. A kid got his taken away today.

C: Yesterday too. (At Traverse City Central by Eric)

B: They’ve got their phones. They’ve got their stuff. They want to be connected and I think the biggest challenge is that I’ve moved away from, like I told you earlier, “Google Answers” and I’ve moved into “Tell me why Answers” (13:15) and the kids hate it. They hate. They hate reading. They hate writing but I think it’s going to make them better in the long run. I know it’s going to make them better because when Logan was asking, “What’s the difference between high school and college?” You got to read and you got to write and if you can’t read and write you can’t make it. And so by making them read George Washington’s Farewell Address or Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and decipher it, break it down and tell me what it means, they hate doing it but I hope in the long run they see they’re getting better from me making them do that. And I hope it’s a life skill. I know I talked about connections and it doesn’t matter in the long run what they learned about George Washington if they learned a new skill that they can use later in life on something else. They’re going to get instructions that they don’t know how to do from a boss and they’re going to have to figure things out for their own one day.

C: And part of that is the discipline of learning versus a “one off” kind of thing. “Ok, The Civil War started in 1861, I’m over.” Versus, why (did the war start)? Like you said before.

B: We didn’t spend, when I did the Civil War, we didn’t talk about battles, we didn’t talk about military strategy because you could spend a week on Gettysburg. We talked about why they fought, and who won, why they won overall and why Europe didn’t get involved. We talked ‘bigger picture’ because I want them to understand that stuff. If they care about Gettysburg they can Google it and found out themselves because there’s so much stuff out there. It’s almost overwhelming for them.

C: So how do they filter through all that information? And actually use it? 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?

B: I have to pre-test and post-test kids for the semester and right now they let me use my exam so they get a pre-test on their exam and then they’ll get the same exam at the end of the year and then I have to take that test and look at what questions they missed, what they didn’t miss and then set up my 18 week course on that information to see where we are strong and where we are weak and then I’ll use, you didn’t see it today, a lot of exit slip type things. “What did you learn today?” “What do you know?” And I use a lot of that on Schoology. There’s a discussion board where a kid can post real quick, he can’t see what anyone else has to say. He doesn’t interact with anyone else. He just gives me a snapshot of “This is what I learned today. This is what I know.” And then it lets me see, did they get the main point today? Where do I need to go back and talk about that? I will use my bell work time at the beginning of the hour a lot of times to reinforce what we did yesterday and kind of fix issues that they might not have figured out. Like, I think you saw, the First Hour kind of got the handout and as more and more questions started coming in I spent more time during 5th Hour.

C: Push/Pull. (reference to one of the ideas that came up during classes before 5th Hour)

B: “This is what has already come up” because I thought every kid who opens the door, I figured they could get “push/pull” thing but it wasn’t quite hitting home and then I think it started to during 5th Hour. But I think that’s another thing. I don’t think you can make yourself a better teacher week by week. It almost has to be hour by hour. First Hour gets this different from 5th Hour because you figured some things out (how the students are learning and how to present information or use different processes/methods/strategies for student learning). And maybe last year when I gave that assignment that wasn’t an issue. They got it. Then this year it didn’t quite translate or whatever it might be. In some hours it did. 3rd Hour there were no questions. They were fine.

C: I think there’s a fallacy and several people talked around this or about this, that once you get the system fixed, it will be the same for every kid which totally ignores differentiation. You have different kids in different years.

B: And different kids in different years, hours. Like there’s some kids, the girls in the back that I was talking to there that I was talking to a lot of time during that 5th Hour, they’re some of the higher students and they got and they wanted to ask deeper questions. They wanted to know about the Texas Oil thing and they Googled it until they found it. They didn’t want to just quit. They didn’t find it at first. Then you’ve got other kids that they just want to get it done, get out and move on. And one kid, we have a kid that I pre-tested him both marking periods. He got a 95%. He’s not taking the exam. He’s getting a 100% because that’s the rule if you get over a certain percentage they just get a 100%. And he’s basically just doing work now because he’s here. (Not really differentiating instruction because this student is waiting for everyone to catch up to him. What kind of extension work might this student be allowed to do to equate with his level of intelligence or ability? How might teachers find the time to be able to more carefully align curriculum with each students’ needs? Is kind of individual alignment even possible, given the size of classes and the multitude of responsibilities that teachers are already charged with doing?) He could be in all AP classes in high school but we don’t, unfortunately have them for him. (so Brian recognizes that this student is not being well served, in part because Ovid-Elsie is small, rural and somewhat isolated from the services and opportunities that larger, suburban or urban districts might be able to offer. Would technology help to answer that question?) So he might have to do a lot of online stuff. (Brian sees online learning as a possible answer.) So he’s going into, he’s doing Geometry as an 8th Grader and he will take Advanced Algebra next year as a freshman. So he’s going to have to do like Calc and Trig or whatever online, somehow. I don’t know.

C: Well I know, I think it’s out there (that possibility) for him.

B: We can find something for him but it’s just going to stink that he’s going to have to basically self-teach himself this class now because he’s not going to have the teacher available. (But he might have an online teacher available). But I guess that’s our problem as a smaller district.

C: How about the evaluation of you by the administration? What is that process like and how has that helped you? (18:36)

B: It is definitely different. This year we’ve adopted a new strategy, I guess I don’t have one sitting around, it’s a 5D rubric and it’s a lot about trying to make goals and set goals for yourself as a teacher. We get evaluated based on the pre-test and post-test. I think I have to have about 95% of my students make a 15% gain from the pre to post test, which they should.

C: Yeah.

B: That shouldn’t be a problem, but then we were basically told this year that no teacher is “highly effective”. We are all going to be just “effective”.

C: You said that to me before and I’m still shaking my head (in disbelief).

B: It blew my head because I didn’t get it because seniority laws and tenure laws are kind of out the window now so we’re all down a step from where we were before. Technically we are all open to being released maybe? I don’t know how that’s going to work in the long run. We’re trying to fight that with them.

C: Or maybe it’s their way of showing growth because if they put everybody back then they can say, “Hey, we did a great job! Next year everybody is “highly effective”.

B: This year when the MSTEP came out (new state test) our principal did not even talk to us about it. He didn’t prep the kids for it. They didn’t know it was coming because he said, “It’s our first test. We want it to be low so we can show growth next year.” Ok, so maybe that’s what they are doing with the evaluation as long as it doesn’t mean getting “pink slipped”, it doesn’t affect pay. I mean we get a $50 bonus if we’re “highly effective” so (Brian did a thumbs up signal but it was obvious to me that he thought $50 was not much).

C: Ooo, wow! That will pay for green’s fees. (One round of golf on a good golf course.)

B: Yeah, maybe. After taxes probably not.

C: Yeah, well, it will hardly pay for a tank of gas. So, because this system has changed you really don’t know the impact. What did you use before the 5 D?

B: I don’t remember what it was called. There were different standards and benchmarks you were supposed to hit. It was very similar to what the 5D was. Gosh, I can’t think of the name. I want to say it came from Oregon but maybe that’s where the 5D came from.

C: Danielson? Or something like that?

B: I think so.

C: Ok.

B: This time the 5 D, my understanding of it is, it is supposed based more on what the kids are doing rather than on what I’m doing.

C: Right.

B: So like before when you came in you writing down notes on what I was doing and how I interacted with the kids. Now when the principal when he pops has his iPad and he’s supposed to check off things he sees the kids doing and I guess that’s how our evaluation gets tagged. We don’t set up an evaluation time anymore.

C: Just drop in?

B: Just drop in. 10-15 minutes. He stays and goes. I think next week I want to say I have my final “whatever”. I don’t know. We’ll see.

C: Is that once a semester or any time?

B: Once a year.

C: Once a year.

B: Oh, for the evaluation, he can pop in any time he wants.

C: Ok.

B: We’re supposed to…the one thing he checks is, we have to submit lesson plans every week still.

C: On Friday?

B: Monday morning. It’s kind of more like a general vague outline. So on Monday we are doing this, Tuesday…I don’t have to do like an ITIP or anything like that, like down to the second, minute, what we are doing. But if he walks in he expects to see something matching what you sent him.

C: Sure.

B: There have been times where I’ve emailed him, “I had to scrap it. It didn’t work. Chromebooks are down.” Whatever. “So we’re doing this instead.” And I don’t know if that will count against me or not. It shouldn’t because that is what teaching is, but we’ll see. I think he’s smart enough to get that so hopefully it works out.

C: Now is that, going back to the assessments and evaluations, your students and you, do you have to tie the questions into standards (he nodded “yes”) and do you have to cite those with your lesson plan with your evaluation?

B: Definitely. Yeah, when I have a lesson plan I have to put the standard in that we are covering. Any assessment that I give a kid I have to tie it to a standard. I don’t know. We haven’t taken the next step yet where we have to complete the…and I’m worried that this is happening…standard based grading. (What Pam is dealing with at Hamilton.) So if a kid doesn’t pass U.5.1.3, they don’t get whatever that is, technically they are not supposed to move on if we move to that (form of grading). But what that will turn into in a secondary room I have no idea.

C: Right.

B: I think you can handle that in an elementary classroom because my wife has to do a little bit of that in the Second Grade where if a kid can’t read at the third grade level he stays in the second grade books but all the other kids are reading at the same time. I think if it goes to that we are in trouble at the secondary level.

C: Yeah.

B: Because I don’t know how I can have one group on Chapter 17 and another group on Chapter 5. And if that happens I don’t know what we will go to. (23:40)

C: Right.

B: I think, I hope we are not going there but it has been brought up a couple times. I hope it doesn’t happen.

C: I don’t know if anybody knows what that would look like, really.

B: It just…it can’t work. I don’t know how any teacher instruction could take place if I have one group of kids doing Reconstruction and another group that is still on the Constitution. I mean that is such a gap I don’t know how you can even…They talked about us giving up teaching in chronological order and going to theme teaching. And trying to pair more with Language Arts, but I think she is kind of hesitant to do that. I could care less. I would just do whatever but I don’t know, we will see what happens with that too. So things are coming, maybe.

C: Well, yeah, all you know for sure is things will change. Have you pursued continuing ed? You told me before that you got your Master’s. What is your Master’s in, by the way?

B: Administration.

C: Ok. Either in the form of a graduate program, obviously, or professional development, and my understanding is that everybody gets professional development, and how has this education influenced your success in the classroom? So you can do your graduate work and then PD or however you want to mix it up.

B: PD-wise years ago our budget kind of got reduced for that. I used to be able to go to the Social Studies conference. We can’t go to that anymore. We don’t have the money for it. I could pay for it myself and they might cover my sub fee but we don’t get to go to that kind of stuff. Basically our PD is limited to district-provided which is not very good. I would say in the 9 years I have been here I have walked away from maybe two or three of them with a “That was a well-used time.” Because there is no way you can cover…we try to do district-wide. A topic that a kindergarten teacher and a senior teacher are going to want the same thing so it’s very vague. It’s very generic. It doesn’t always, I would say, make us better in the long run. I try to join the professional organizations that I can find and get their newsletters and find what I can out there for myself but unfortunately the professional development is what I am able to find on my own. And with the two sports now I don’t have time to go to all the conferences. I’m out of class…I’m not a department chair, but an NCA school improvement chair so I already miss 5 days to go to those things and three or four days for track and there was like 12 days I was out of school this year for stuff. I can’t go to other conferences…I don’t want to go to other conferences. I’d rather stay here and make sure that I’m running the show instead of leaving sub plans and having to worry, “Are they getting the right stuff? Are they doing it correctly?” So as far as district-provided I guess I am kind of unlucky. I don’t know if that’s the case in other districts. But for my continuing education, the administrative stuff I done I think has helped when we had to step in for the administrator that was gone. It helps when I have to make decisions in the classroom, how to handle certain kids. I know, long term, if I do this, this is what is going to happen to me in the future or what is going to happen to that kid. So sometimes that helps out. And eventually I think I want to move into administration, probably athletic administration, if anything. And I see that (his Master’s) maybe setting the foundation for that later in the future. Just don’t plan on that in the next few years unless it hits the fan and things go crazy and who knows, we’ll see then. Or if the right opportunity opens up at the right spot.

C: Does the district send teachers to the RESA for any PD?

B: We do. I’ve gotten less information. The information that I’ve gotten from the RESA on PD is more like programs that they have coming out. A few years ago they pushed a program called GoNat, onlining testing database type thing. They pushed us to go to that. Examview was another one that they were big on but as far as actual Social Studies PD I haven’t been to one at RESA.

C: Ever?

B: Not that I can think of. I have been through like an RTI program. SAFE schools, like how to restrain kids without…we had a couple kids who were coming through who were real questionable so an 8th grade teacher and a 7th grade teacher, a team in case the kid needed to be restrained or subdued. But as far as actual content stuff I can’t think of one time when I ever have gone through something at RESA.

C: Ok.

B: I don’t even know if we have even know if we have a Social Studies Curriculum Director at the RESA. (28:41) I’m sure we do. I don’t know who it is.

C: The ISD that I’m on the Board for has moved toward “Teachers in Residence” so starting next year as a pilot they are going to have an English teacher go to the ISD for two years with the purpose of going to all the 15 schools in the ISD to do individual PD.

B: Yeah, that would be great.

C: And so, eventually, they’re going to work it so, and after two years that teacher goes back to their classroom. So they want to do that for all the content areas.

B: That would be nice.

C: And the teachers that I’ve talked to in the schools, they say, “You know, instead of bringing somebody in, even if it’s just from the ISD or RESA, versus an actual teacher in the classroom that has ongoing experience, we would rather have somebody who has their foot in the classroom versus somebody in an office.”

B: Now that you mentioned it, the most that we have actually done with the RESA Social Studies PD is trying to align the curriculum. To figure out what the 5th and 6th grade teachers are going, what I’m doing, not that it works or matters because some of them do what they want anyway, but that’s the only thing they have ever done so if they started something like that where a teacher traveled around and did PD…

There was an interruption and we started over a little.

C: Ok, so continuing, you have your Master’s in Administration and PD district-wide has been sort of “iffy” and not so much from RESA. What forms of mentoring were provided and how well did the mentoring process serve to improve your teaching?

B: When I started we did not really have an official mentoring program. I was fortunate that the Math and the Science teacher that were here when I got here, the Math teacher was like a 30-40 year teacher. He had taught at a private school over in another town for a very long time so he needed to work here to try to get his retirement up and the Science teacher, who is now an Elementary principal, they were both willing to help out and if I had issues or problems I could go talk to them. As far as an actual curriculum mentor I didn’t have anybody in the department. I am the 8th grade History Department. I’m it, so I would bounce ideas off the guy who was hired at the same time, who was a 7th grade teacher but for going to somebody and saying, “How should I do this or what should I do with this?” I had to come up with stuff on my own. As far as student issues and how to relate to the kids, I was able to talk to the other two guys for those issues but as far as having to meet or spending so many hours with my mentor or anything like that, we didn’t have one.

C: Ok.

B: If we did, it was never really enforced.

C: So you were basically on your own?

B: Yeah.

C: And that’s more a function of the fact that the school district is small than anything else?

B: Yeah. There’s one 8th grade Math teacher, one 8th grade Science and we’re it. I’ve tried reaching out to the guy who was here before me but I never heard anything back from him. He left all his stuff and I think we talked about it at lunch after Year One if I never touched it I threw it away. I just cleared house and said I’m going to do it differently. I’m get my own stuff. I think it’s helped. I think it’s made me better in the long run.

C: A lot of work but still…yeah.

B: I never had to…when I took my Master’s classes we had to talk about common assessments and different teachers in the department doing the same thing, yeah, we all did the same thing because I was it. So my common assessment thing, my piece was real short. I got in a little bit of trouble for it but I didn’t have a department so common assessments, every 8th grader took the same test because I gave it to every 8th grader.

C: Makes life a little simple.

B: Yeah, they thought I was being sarcastic when I wrote it but, no, not yet and they looked it up and found out I wasn’t lying.

C: “Pearls of Wisdom” question and then I’m going to add one more after that in case you want to add anything else on your own. And I’ll share this with my current students. (33:02) Anything you wish you knew before you got into teaching that…what you do wish you had left GVSU with in your “toolbox” before you started your career?

B: The first thing I want to know, as teachers, what did we do to become Public Enemy #1? Because I don’t know why, but there is this outcry against that we, as teachers, are doing some wrong and I know there are teachers out there that are evil and awful because you hear about them on the news, you see the stories, but it’s a very small percentage, so be willing and ready for people to give you a hard time about what you are going into but do it because you love it and that’s what you want to do. (33:47) As far as a “toolbox”, network as much as possible and meet and find as many people in other districts as you can. I’ve got connections now through development I did get to go to, I have got people I know in the “Thumb”, Detroit area, Grand Rapids, that if I am struggling with something I can email them and I know they will come back. I know I can email you. Don’t be afraid to ask for help because you’re probably not the first one and definitely won’t be the last one. It’s really ok to fail at something if you’re trying something new.

C: Yeah.

B: I have done it before where, “We’re going to try this assessment or we’re going to try this thing online” and it was awful and I’ve been honest with the kids. “Hey, guys, I found this. It thought it would be good. It was awful. I’m sorry.” And the kids respect the honesty. I think that is part of the relationship. If you can talk to them, they can talk to you. It’s nice for them to know that you are not just a classroom teacher. You do other stuff. I don’t know, the podium I have, the front are things I’ve done and the sides are where kids have put stickers on there. I’ve got “One Direction” stickers all over that thing. I don’t know a single song they sing. The kids love it. They’ll ask about the stickers and where I’ve went and what I do and they like knowing you do other things outside of school. Be a person.

C: And I know the book, “The First Day of School” they talk about having pictures of your family and your diploma and all that stuff and I guess (his podium) is an example of that.

B: And they will ask me, “What’s this from?” and there’s a Salty Dog thing and, the kids like it and, “Oh, it’s a surf shop in Daytona Beach when we went to see my brother.” And they want to know about your family. They want to know stuff because, especially in the district I’m in, some of the kids’ home life is awful. It sucks. They don’t know where mom and dad are. They don’t know if mom and dad have a job so having a constant adult that they can turn to is reassuring for a lot of them. And they might hate you one day because you are enforcing a rule but they are going to respect you for enforcing a rule. Don’t be ‘wishy-washy’. Stick to your guns. They might hate you but they will get over it. And it’s worked for me so far so… After we walked through the high school and asked 12 kids, 4 or 5 of them might not have a great opinion of me but they would say, “Yeah, he did a good job. But he did this, this and this, that I didn’t like” because I was enforcing what I supposed to.

C: Exactly.

B: And you don’t paid for them to like you all the time.

C: No.

B: And sometimes they won’t.

C: And they turn out better if they know you have consequences. Without a doubt. I don’t know anyone in their right mind who would say, “There are no consequences in life so you don’t have to worry about that.”

B: I don’t make enough money for that. I’m sure the Paris Hiltons of the world and whoever the new…the Kardashians or whatever…that is their situation but I’m not in the boat so it won’t be me ever.

C: Most people aren’t in that boat. Anything you would like to add that I didn’t touch upon in the questions, about being successful in your teaching career and not being part of the bad statistic of those (people who leave the profession so quickly).

B: You got to have fun. I don’t know if you saw but there are kids that if you were just in there in the room you might think, “Oh, he’s picking on them” or “Oh, he’s doing this with them.” But I think you could tell with about the relationships, with like that Ruby girl, I make fun of her all the time but there are certain kids you can do that with and certain ones you can’t. You have got to be able to judge the kids. You’ve got to be able to read the room and do it because you have fun. There are days when I don’t want to be here. I’m tired. But they don’t want that from you. They want you. They want who you are supposed to be so just have fun with it. Enjoy it.

C: You have to come with your “A” game.

B: There are days when you might not have it but they are going to get it out of you somehow. You are going to have years when the mix of kids is just not good and you are going to wonder why you are doing it but you are going to have other years…last year I had a great group of kids, and this year we have a good one, but last year I could have left the room for a half hour and if I had written instructions on the board they would have been on the 1, 2…they would have just kept going. And that was really a fun year and we got to do a lot of fun stuff and then maybe you have to scale it back one year and you can’t be the same person each year. You have to change and work with it.

C: Thanks Brian.