Carlos Flores April 27 2015

Orchard View High School

C: It’s April 27, 2015 and I’m at Orchard View High School with Carlos Flores and when we talked before (2008) you were at Muskegon High School teaching various subjects and now, if I get this right, you’re both with the JAG program and MIS.

F: Yes.

C: Ok, ok. So, first question, how do you define success in teaching and do you believe Grand Valley State prepared you for success in the classroom and you can deal with that however you want to.

F: Success, I think, um, I kind of look at the beginning and then where we are at the end. Now grades may be a B or D but I sense progress from where we started to where we end. We chip away at what we want to get done, chip away and build, chip away and build. I look at the end when I see whatever the issue that we’re talking about or dealing with, how have you grown when I see the first thing you did to the last thing you did. Where are you at? I think I’m pretty good at taking them far. So that’s kind of how I look at it. I’m kind of steering a ship. Am I taking it in the right direction? That’s how I evaluate myself. Am I doing it right that semester and can we do these things that we couldn’t do before then we are doing ok. I kind of took that ship in the right place I guess.

C: That’s something I find a challenge in my job in preparing teachers is number one; to say, “ok, you’re paying all this money at Grand Valley, but number one, I can’t guarantee you that you’ll be successful and I almost know for certainty I’m not going to give you every single tool you need before you walk out of these doors.” And that’s tough on my side because I don’t want to have people leave and after whatever time say, “I can’t deal with this.” To get people toward the frame of mind where, like you just mentioned, I can see in increments, even though I know I’m not hitting the spot all the way but I’m getting closer, that for me would be success for me to be able to do that. So the second part of that question then, did Grand Valley help with that or is that just all you, Carlos?

F: Like I told you before I am very pleased with my education at Grand Valley number one. I remember first getting accepted being nervous and meeting with you before I started those classes. That to me…then started the classes because I did love the content and I wanted to teach. I loved it (college) and from the College of Ed, those things were kind of drilled into us. The stuff we do here, warm-ups, assessments, routines, we were really drilled with that.

C: Yeah.

F: It paid off. It is correct. You need to do it. So I think I was well prepared. It was reinforced with student teaching. You guys coming in…there was somebody from the content, somebody from the School of Ed…they gave me different things and I took them to heart. I wanted to be better and you know, I’m a guy that wanted to be the best. I still do. You add that up I think and like I said, I think I was well prepared. Let’s be honest, it’s a real tough job. School can give you some ways to help you with it. Take advantage of it. I was happy with many things I got from Grand Valley.

C: That’s good to hear. So second question then. We talked a little bit about this before I turned the camera on: biggest challenges to your career so far?

F: I don’t mind being personal with you and telling you. I don’t know if it’s a plausible professional any more.

C: Financially, you mean?

F: Yes. Money-wise, what do you make any more? Is it worth it? I’m not saying there’s no terrible way but the job has changed. Data that you need to report nowadays is really off the charts. All these things that you’re expected to do, your UP and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ determined by a test score. And I just don’t know if that’s plausible. Which, that’s pretty tough to deal with when you go to school and you feel like that’s your “calling”. I feel like this is my “calling”. I’m pretty good at it, I think. For that to be in a place where I don’t know if I can do it anymore. That sucks. That sucks a lot. You know I like it. I like the classroom. I have no desire to be a principal. I don’t want to move up. Give me a room full of kids. I’ll do that until I can’t do it anymore. But I don’t know if it’s possible. That’s scary. That’s not good for kids either.

C: No, and that’s, you know, I really like your definition of success and then by mentioning those standardized tests with this question, it…I think you’ve got it right and then to have somebody like a legislature, somebody else say, “No, your teaching is going to be judged on a one-time high-stakes test” doesn’t match with what other people’s correct definition of success is. To have it as a little part, ok, just as a series of things but just as it to be a “be all, end all” is doing it (teaching) a disservice. Then like you said too, earlier, the financial part, if you have to give more towards student loans and cutting away on fringe benefits and decreasing the salary then obviously it’s harder.

F: Like I said that’s the biggest challenge. Number two, which we talked about, is I teach in a community where there is poverty and seeing the things that happen to kids in the community that’s hard too. I don’t want to get into deaths and prison but you see some terrible things. It can tax you, tax your soul a little bit. To keep that in check is difficult. You’ll take a lot home, a lot home, with that kind of stuff. That’s a challenge that I’ll take, I’ll deal with that if I can survive doing the job.

C: And that leads right into the third question: (7:03) With the stresses and you’re in a really high stress part of teaching, but there is stress throughout (the profession) no matter where you are teaching, and a little bit easier in some places than others, obviously, but still, how do you deal with that? In a non-destructive way, I’m trying to make it.

F: It’s tough. I’m pretty busy. I have a daughter now and so that takes up a lot of my time.

C: How old is she?

F: She’s 5. She just won in t-ball.

C: Oh, neat!

F: That keeps me pretty grounded, her…this is the funny thing, like teaching, once you start doing this and you’ve been doing it for a while, so much of it becomes a part of life, like you’ve been to a mall where people see you. When I go to the mall, like during Christmas or any time I go to the mall to shop, (gestured like he doesn’t like shopping or going to the mall) when I go I get, “like are you famous?” because I see tons of kids (that come up to me) and that part is awesome. Ex-students come over all the time. “Can I come over to work on a paper?” “Can I come over and you can help me with it?” I say, “come on over”. They know where I live. They stop by. I live in the neighborhood at Muskegon where I taught. So it’s all incorporated now. It’s all part of…my ex-students know my nieces and nephews. It’s just so interwoven in life. It isn’t just a job, you know. You know I’m not at Muskegon anymore. I’m still “Coach”. I’m still “Mr. Flores, can I come over and do this? Can you help me”. You know, it’s this job now, Michigan Works and “can I write my resume?” That part is fun. It makes it worth it. Getting a thank you letter from one of my ex-wrestlers goes a long way. That text before he walks across the stage at Hope (College). “Oh, man, dude, don’t do this to me!” (Laughing to avoid a display of emotion)

C: Yeah, I don’t want to make you cry, but that’s got to be tremendously fulfilling.

F: Yeah, it is. It is. There’s a group of 5. They wrestled for me. I call them “The Boys” but Keyra, she’s part of it. We get together. At least once a year we eat and it’s amazing. You’re getting old you guys. They graduated from college. I have one that isn’t but the rest have and they’re all doing something noble so whether it’s in the health field or Fleury is working for the Boys and Girls Club in a different part of the state. I don’t know. It’s fun to get together. It’s kind of cool for me to…it wasn’t all for nothing. It paid off. This kid is doing something. A lot of these kids, it was the first time in their family graduating from college so that’s going to change the dynamic. Their kids are going to be a little different, grow up different than they did.

C: Now were you the first in your family graduating (from college)? So was I. 35 cousins and I was the first one.

F: Nice.

C: So, it’s pretty neat.

F: I think it does change things. I really do. I think in my sister’s kids. How good they’re doing. We were raised different. My mom was working and it was me and her. Unbelievable stuff those kids are doing. Just as an example, my nephew…sportsaholic…it’s not all my fault…

C: I don’t think that’s a fault!

F: He’s in middle school and I’m just amazed at this kid. He is running track. He never ran track. So I said, “Do you want to run track?” He said, “I’ll try it.” He just made this All Star City meet. Plays on two basketball teams at the Y. He’s in 7th grade and he’s playing at the Y in downtown Muskegon with the 9th and 10th graders so he is a little guy with the big guys. Two teams down there. He also plays football. So he lifts two days a week with the football team. He’s at the school two days a week early because they moved him from quarterback to running back and he wants the quarterback job back so he goes to school in the morning. I know it’s a lot but he wants to do it. His grades are good so I’m going to let him do it. He’s just…his grades are terrific. All their grades are terrific and me and my sister, we weren’t great students. I think me being there, it helps a lot when I can help them out with their grades. He had a PowerPoint presentation on the state of Texas so me and him did that together so it’s changed the atmosphere at home. “What do you have to do for school?” Where with my mom, it was she didn’t understand that you had to work with your kids as much. I think it’s a generational thing. But now we know. I’m a little overboard with my daughter. We do a lot of fun stuff, but she’s reading at a first grade level right now and she’s five. We went to a kindergarten Round Up meeting and I went, “You’re going to be bored here” but, you know that’s a good problem I guess.

C: That is a good problem.

F: But I think that came from my education. Me being educated. I learned that we have to do these things. It’s fun but I think even some parents now don’t know that you have to…

C: To reinforce that I have some students who come in, and cause even this year, the incoming Freshmen class at Grand Valley, 40% First Gen (first generation college students).

F: Wow!

C: So I’ll get them, maybe a handful, every year who come in and say, “Can I just talk to you because I can’t talk about what college is when I go home. They just don’t understand.” And they’ll get phone calls, “Well, I really need you to come home to babysit” or “I really need you to come home to do this”. “I’ve got work to do.” “I’m going to college.” It’s like stone silence on the phone or recrimination because like, yeah, “Just because you’re in college you still have got to do this”. They just need to talk to somebody because nobody understands…

F: Exactly.

C: It sounds like knowing the stress you’re dealing with it sounds like you have some really rewarding ways to deal with that at the same time.

F: Yeah, absolutely. You know it’s all turned into one big thing. It’s not separated and that makes it worth it. I’m friends with ex-students on Facebook and that is so great. Matice Clark graduated from Howard (University) with honors. The work she manages…she worked for NPR for a while. She was traveling the world and I said, “I don’t want to talk to you anymore.” (Said in a way that he didn’t think he was on her level anymore but in a way that he celebrated her success.) Now she’s managing a radio station and I have a student who wants to go to Howard so they’re going to hook up and talk about how hard it is go there and stuff like that. But seeing that stuff, that’s awesome. I remember I was in a staff meeting in Muskegon when I found out she was graduating with honors and another teacher with no tech skills said, “Tell her I said ‘hi’.” So I did it right in front of her and it was funny. That stuff is awesome to me, seeing your kids, hearing them on Facebook and now they’re having kids and, “Am I that old?”

C: You’ve got that little grey working right there Carlos. But you’re not that old.

F: That stuff is great. Or like this happened just a couple of weeks ago (14:23) Pierre wrestled for me. He started at Steel Middle School. He was 60 pounds, 8th grader and his son is wrestling this year. A 7 year old so I had to go watch him. That was really cool, seeing that. That kind of stuff is crazy. I can’t believe it’s been that long.

C: Crazy good!

F: Oh, yeah. It’s great stuff.

C: How are you motivated to best serve your students? What keeps the fire going?

F: There’s a lot.

C: To turn the question around a little bit, to give you a chance to think about it, I think, I’m just guessing that, one of the reasons, you know the rate for people leaving teaching is really high, and I know, probably, that relates to the stress question, they can’t find ways to effectively deal with stress, but I think in the process some of the “fire” goes out, and, you know, with everything you are dealing with how do you keep the fire going?

F: A couple of things with that question, I don’t know, it’s kind of weird, I guess, teachers and coaches did a lot for me, a lot. And it’s kind of the deal I made. You went through all this and I’ll give back. It’s how I paid you back, my coaches, my teachers, kind of like I owe them, so…

C: You’re paying it forward.

F: Right. That’s a big part of it. I didn’t grow up too great so I understand what kids are dealing with so if you can help that, do that. So I don’t mind being with somebody until 5 o’clock or I needed that ride too so I think just service. I think we definitely serve and I like it. I feel good about it. I want to leave a positive footprint when I’m gone so I know I did something to help, not just consumed. I did something to contribute. Whether, later on, so and so is going to teach this kid how to tie a tie how I taught him. If it’s something as simple as that, great. Or just, you know, “I remember that guy’s class. We had a lot of fun.” Whatever someone gets something positive out of it I think it’s noble. I know it’s not seen as a noble career but I think it’s an awesome job to have. I mean you’re with kids all day and you can help influence them and change their thinking. I don’t know. What better job is there?

C: And sometimes I think we think it may be little things but for some kids it is the little things are what stick with them. It doesn’t have to be huge, huge, huge things, it can just be some little thing like you say, “hi” to them every morning or something like that and that sticks and that’s the feedback that I’ve gotten from my students over the years. I’ve been doing this for 42 years. I do the Facebook thing and I still hear back from my students who are now in the mid-50s.

F: Awesome.

C: It is awesome.

F: I think also with Number 4 (Question #4 from the interview questions) I think in your job with what you do, I think, you have seen a lot of people who just don’t like working with kids that are doing this and I don’t understand it, but just in their attitude you can see it. “You don’t like the kids.” And that’s not me. I joked around a lot with my kids. Just as an example, we have this long going, year-long argument about Batman versus Superman. It’s just so funny about how we talk about it but I enjoy it. I enjoy talking to the kids. We have fun. I just think if you want to teach and you are pursuing a certificate to teach you better confront that question (do you like to work with kids?) and deal with it. Because I could not imagine, if I didn’t like kids, doing this job for a long period of time. I don’t know what it is but that is some thing that kids got to do is look at it and say, “Do I really like working with young people?” Because if you don’t I just know if you’re going to like it or want to be good at it. I do. I enjoy working with kids. I think it comes naturally to me. It kind of, it just does. I have just as much fun coaching my daughter’s t-ball team as I did coaching varsity wrestling or kids in the classroom. It’s fun. If you can relate to them, relate to them. I don’t know, I think for that question, you need to know that you like working with kids. I don’t know how you do that, how you figure that out but you’ve got to figure that out. You don’t want to be two years out and you’re just spiteful towards kids.

C: And that’s one of the things that the university is always concerned about, you put four years into (your college education) and then you do teacher-assisting and student teaching but we want to somehow have our students figure that out before that fifth year. But without long term exposure in the classroom but we’re sort of scratching our heads, literally, about how to get that done. (that kind of experience and understanding). And I still tell my students every semester, “You know if you figure that out now, even though you’re in the fifth year and you’ve gone through all this and you figured out it’s not for you, that’s a good thing.” Versus now you’re in a classroom with kids that are depending on you and you figured it out and you’re impacting them. It’s still tough. It’s good and it’s bad. The other part of that is though is I get the feeling that you still love the content though too.

F: Yeah, like Mr. Bolhouse next door he teaches social studies and my door is open and I hear him talking and I want to…

C: You want jump in.

F: We talk about it. He’s really great for me. We bounce ideas off each other. I tell him a lot about what we do in class. “Red Scare”, “that’s easy, do that, do this”. I even send him some stuff I find that might help him. I miss U.S. History. God, I miss some of the stuff we did for that. I miss Government a lot and Econ.

C: But you’re teaching Econ though (through personal finance projects he has his students do). In a different way, but you are teaching Econ and I’m sure there are other conversations that you get into with the kids that go across the spectrum (of the social studies)

F: Oh, yes, absolutely.

C: You hit upon this a little bit already in our previous conversation about methods and strategies that you use in your classroom and you said part of the foundation was set or a good foundation was set at Grand Valley but have you changed the way you reach out to kids at all? Have you shucked some things and kept some others?

F: I think a general rule I have now is every year I want to make sure I am trying something different. I just think I don’t want to be that teacher doing the same thing I did 20 years ago. I just think you need to grow. You have to be every day trying to be better at this job. There’s no, “He figured it out”. No, “He’s still figuring it out” because it’s that kind of job. Whatever you can figure out that works better, try it. Now look, there’s been some people with me who in years past, “You believe what he’s doing, oh, my god, he’s trying, he’s doing this”. Some things work out, some things don’t. Some people thought I was crazy. Some people thought I was a genius. That is still big with me. I don’t like doing anything the same every year. How do we make it better?

C: Can you give me an example of something you tried?

F: The Academic, the Flow Now Mix. It’s way off, when it was introduced to me I thought it was kind of boring, kind of stale and we made it more ‘kid-friendly’ with how we did it. I don’t know if you remember Rick Barnes. He was in our Capstone together.

C: Oh, yeah.

F: He volunteered to be in my classroom for a year. We did this together. We came up with this together. We turned into a more kid-friendly or student friendly kind of exercise where we started slow but at the end they picked up a lot. We just improved it. That was our idea. And every year I still text him or call him. “Look, man, I’m trying this, what do you think?” I just always want to be better. Some things work, some things don’t. I think the old days of taking notes off a PowerPoint…aahhh…are not going to work anymore. I am a fan of interactive stuff in class. I think that’s the best. I use “History Alive” and I have not found anything better than that stuff. The interactive stuff. You can do that with students in a way that they can have fun with you. You guys are laughing, joking, you’re taking stuff here, if you can do that that’s the best way. Like I said last time, we’ve all done those, I think I mentioned last time (2008) World War I trench warfare. Kids are…you don’t have to review that. You don’t have to do any notes. They pick that up. (He was referring to a History Alive! Activity I used to do in my Methods class where I had the students make “trenches” out of the tables. Then they made waded up paper balls and hid behind the tables. One group would have to show itself and get bombarded and then it was the opposing groups’ turn. They did not want to stand up because they knew what was going to happen to them. What better way to teach the impact of charges out of trenches during World War I?) Those things, I’m a big fan of that stuff you know. We even used some in the summer in that juvenile program I was teaching in. The first thing we did was a simple assembly line.

C: Oh, right, “History Alive!”

F: It was, man, they ate it up. And these are tough kids and hard to win over but they got the sense of what we were talking about. They laughed. They had a good time. We talked about quality and it was really great. That’s History Alive! I could talk to them about processes at a factory or I could do this with them and that worked out great.

C: Right because they’re actually doing it. Right, plus it’s broad enough that you can apply it later on instead of doing something specific. Now we talked about this a little bit before too, (had to stop camera because it was set on 30 minutes for easier uploading). What types of evaluations, both informal and formal, are used to assess your teaching and how are these evaluations used to better your teaching. And this goes back from the beginning of your career, Carlos, and even today?

F: That’s a hard one for me, I guess.

C: Well, you already said that standardized tests, you think, is not a good way.

F: Absolutely not. From what I’m hearing it’s going to get worse, some of the stuff they want. Hours that are going to be spent testing…6 days or something, grade levels.

C: Did you see now there is a backlash now? That people are starting to pull their kids (from the testing).

F: I am. I’m sorry, but that’s terrific!

C: You have a right to have an opinion here.

F: I’m not…like I said in the beginning, I’m happy where I’m at now. Where my kids are at, where we’re at the end. I know I’m doing that job. That’s not how it’s going to show on a test so I guess that evaluations I have ever got from administrators those have been good. There might have been a few challenges here and there but my last couple years they have been phenomenal. But I think again to be fair, a lot of that just comes natural to me. I mean where someone has to work at it, a lot of it is natural. So I don’t know if it’s fair. I guess my students, how they do in my class, like any kind of assessment I give you, how many picked it up? I do want to make sure that it’s good. On some personal level you want to be good. I mean it does save me a lot. With this current curriculum there’s not a lot of room for formative assessment so it’s a little more challenging but if there were more of a core class or a social studies class…I do more of it. I was pretty successful at that in the past, you know, different methods for that. I don’t know.

C: Do you stop and ask your kids how they are doing?

F: Oh, absolutely. It’s pretty dynamic what they do. They get it. They do. They get why we are doing it, that kind of stuff.

C: But does anyone come in from the office to evaluate what you’re doing here?

F: There’s no formal (evaluation) but I invite them in whenever…

C: Ok.

F: The principal came in when we were doing the balance sheet one day. He was just amazed by it. “They’re picking all this up?” “Look, I only spend 15 minutes on this (activity with the spreadsheet). “I don’t do nothing else.” The kids are explaining to him what they’re doing. He wrote him a check for rent because he bought…that’s good stuff.

C: Then he (the principal) got it.

F: He got it.

C: Question #7 unless you have anything else you would like to add on 6?

F: No, that’s a tough one.

C: No, that’s ok. And any time down the road if you thinking about anything you would like to add you can just email me or call me or whatever. Question #7: Have you pursued continuing education, either in the form of a graduate program or professional development and how has this education influenced your success? So after you left Grand Valley, what have you done?

F: I started taking classes in Ed Leadership but that wasn’t…

C: Wasn’t you…

F: I didn’t…I wasn’t happy with the work and number 2, I really have no desire to be a principal. I’m a classroom guy. I’m cool with that. I’m struggling to find a program. I found one at Central (Michigan). Now all through this time I was coaching while I was teaching. (Stopped to start a new segment of the recording). All this time I was trying to find a program to get my Masters in. Now the whole time I was teaching while I was coaching and I was helping out in the athletic department (at Muskegon High) working events and at the time two of the athletic directors I was working with kind of like, “You should look into this stuff”. (a degree in being an athletic director?) You know coaching is lot like teaching.

C: Definitely

F: I was…I like the Athletic Department and doing things there and pointing out things coaching-wise, what coaches should be doing and what they are not doing. Doing my own scheduling turned into more responsibilities and I found a sports administration program at Central. I know that’s kind a little off but I didn’t want to try that. I guess if things did work out I guess I could leave the classroom for an A.D. job because I love sports and I think coaching is a place where there is a lot of room for improvement in how to deal with kids. Plus I like that process of building a program. When I started at Muskegon there were four kids on the (wrestling) team.

C: Four?

F: And we turned it…we didn’t win the championship or anything but given the atmosphere we kind of changed the culture of wrestling. That’s a big deal.

C: Is your name still on the trophy case over there?

F: A couple of times. (Carlos was an accomplished wrestler at Muskegon High School). I was happy with that program. Actually it was a lot of fun. It was actually in a cohort. The same 12 people in the same class until the end. Fun. Super program but I use a lot of that stuff in my classroom. There was a marketing piece that we did. We talk about entrepreneurship and stuff like that and I bring it all in, whatever I can find I bring in. But it was primarily for athletic directors kind of program so it did help a lot. I took some of that finance piece, brought it in here and we used that. Like I said, the marketing was huge. Management, like spatial management, opened my eyes a lot, like even how you set up your classroom. A lot of that kind of stuff. So it’s teaching…beg, borrow, steal, everything you can. A master’s program is kind of free fall of info for you, take it in, run with it. Even safety. That was huge. Athletic safety. What’s safe in the classroom? Do you understand that? We don’t know what is safe and what is not safe. Simple things like checking the outlet on a plug. If a kid plugs that in it’s going to be a problem (if something is wrong with it). But do we check these things. That was a big part. Just some things that I picked up from my masters program that I still use here.

C: How about school P.D.? Inservice or anything like that? Anything stand out or stand down?

F: Not really. To me it’s more of hoops to jump through. The last couple of years at Muskegon it was data. “Did you collect all your data?” They came in for re-teaching or re-testing. Putting a spreadsheet together for your accommodations for your kids with special needs and…

C: Just data.

F: Dry data, just dry data stuff. Not too much powerful technique that might help you in the classroom. There wasn’t a lot of that.

C: We get that at the college level too.

F: It was more the “school needs this so get this done.”

C: Yeah, data analytics.

F: Not a fan. (33:06)

C: Question #8: “Pearls of Wisdom” and I have shared these over the years with everybody. So what would you tell current students before they start teaching, in other words, what do you wish you knew before you left GVSU to start your career?

F: I’m going to be very honest with you.

C: Please!

F: I do caution kids, students today that are thinking about teaching, “Look at what you’re getting into”. It’s not easy. The pay is really going downhill. The work you are getting is a little off the charts in regards to how many hours you work a day. You know Master Teachers are losing their jobs because they’re “ineffective” according to a test score. These things are happening. Some part of is that I don’t want my kids to go through that. To be…all I hear is somebody saying derogatory about teachers or teaching when maybe they had a crappy week and maybe at their wits end at the work that they had to get done. To hear that, I don’t want kids to hear that. I do caution them that it’s not easy and you’re going to deal with these things. Look at now and don’t look at it later when you have been doing it for years and you have to figure out that you need to do something else. I do caution students that I don’t know. Check it out first. I, as much as I love the job, and I do love the job, I don’t know how much longer I can do it, which is going to suck, but I do, to very honestly with you, I do have to warn my kids about it. “Look at it first because I don’t know if all that stuff is going to be worth it for you.” There are good parts about it but I don’t know if those out weigh the bad anymore.

C: That’s sad.

F: That’s not nothing.

C: My students like even this semester teacher assisting, they’ve come back to me and said, “My classroom teacher, my CT has said, ‘Think about this twice’. “ I just got that the other day in a reflection paper. I think he (my student) still wants to stick with it (teaching) but some of the same things you just said he got from his CT, in this case over in Forest Hills. A different situation (from Carlos’) obviously but the teacher said, “Here’s everything we’re dealing with as a profession, and, yeah, Forest Hills is nice, but, you still have to deal with some of this stuff.” And that’s the things you were talking about too. So it makes it hard.

F: So that’s number 1. That’s a big one and like I said earlier you have to like working with kids. If you don’t you can’t do this job. I mean, seriously, and I guess last, don’t, I guess I don’t know how to put it, but don’t…accept the atmosphere in the room. You can guide it. You can take it places but can’t control it all. Don’t try to control it all. Let the kids have a little room and you’d be surprised where you can get them. Those things are done with little things. Say “hi” to kids when they come into the room. Read the room. Early on in the semester you notice a kid has a football jersey on. This conversation…you know this kid does this. Find out what your kids like. It’s not just about the content and if you do that. If you can build an atmosphere where everybody feels safe and they’re not afraid to do something then you have half the job licked. If you make that positive atmosphere where no one is afraid to say something or have them feel like, “I’m stupid” or…I think I talked before how to do that, you know, tell funny stories about yourself and open it up. I think that atmosphere if you can make it something that’s pro-learning I think everything else falls into place for you.

C: When I did this the first time in 2008 one of the things that came out in different ways, people were saying and that was establishing relationships with your students. You can’t be their friend necessarily but you have to be someone they can rely on and you have to be able to meet them half way and so it’s good to hear that your view on that hasn’t changed at all. And I think that is why you’re probably still in a classroom too.

F: I think you’re probably right. Other than that I’m not sure.

C: Well, that’s ok. Again if you think of something you would like to add you can shoot me an email. So here’s my set 8 questions so the 9th one is there anything you would like to add that the questions didn’t deal with or in your philosophy of teaching or anything?

F: I don’t know. I guess I don’t think my way is conventional, how I do things. Even how I talk to kids and how we communicate. I don’t know how well that would go off in other places. I do wonder about that but…

C: Do you think there is a perfect template for a teacher?

F: No, not at all. I think there’s challenges at other schools that I don’t think I could deal with. I mean some of the…

C: I’m surprised you said that. I think you’re dealing with some pretty tough stuff.

F: I’m cool. Tough kids, I’m good with that. Some other things I think I struggle with but I guess overall, I don’t know if I conveyed this last time but some of the stuff I did get from Grand Valley and it was part of what you wanted to hear last time. We did so much of the Kansas stuff in your classroom. That stuff was huge developing later. You know when we did PD back then about unit organizing and things like that there was a couple of us who were from Grand Valley and we were way ahead of the curve than other teachers (at Muskegon). When it comes to unit organizer or organizing a course they would start with introducing the Kansas stuff that we were already used to that we had in the School of Ed (and in my methods classes). I mentioned that last time but that was a part of it.

C: So you were ahead of the curve?

F: It was me and someone else but they kind of walked us through the Kansas stuff, but we did this already so…just organizing kind of made a big deal. We did a small presentation just on a government unit, like a government unit on three branches of government and how we tied it all in with a course map. I think they were still working on it when I left (Muskegon) but we had it down because we had to do those in class. That was kind of big. I thought that was huge, looking at it later. We did that already.

C: And I, in the first round, in 2008, whether they’re in Michigan or outside the state, they were asked early on, like in their first year in teaching, “Could you do PD for us because you know…” and that made me feel good that they had such good tools that they were able to go back and say, “Ok, this is the way that I learned it seems to work for me” so that’s good to hear too. And they’re still using that template from KU (University of Kansas) in the College of Ed. I saw it last week. So it must be still working.

F: I used to draw it in the classroom. We used to draw and we filled in a giant… It was really kind of cool, the classroom kind of got, we used it as a class and it kind of turned into a note-taking thing also. We took some notes. I didn’t mention it the last time but it was definitely a big part. That was definitely a big part.

C: Are you good?

F: I think so.