Eric Schugars May 18 2015

Traverse City Central High School

C: It’s May 18th 2015 and I’m at Traverse City Central High School with Eric Schugars in the same school he was when I interviewed you in 2008.

E: That’s right.

C: But newly minted head football coach and changing life and bears some similarities with Jason Duram in coaching background and fathers and all that stuff.

E: Right.

C: So first question, right off the bat, Eric: How do you define success in teaching and then second part of that question, do you believe Grand Valley State prepared you for success in the classroom, knowing that you had a previous degree? So you did this for certification purposes.

E: The bottom line in defining success in teaching is the relationships. It’s relationship based in my opinion, whether I’m teaching or coaching. Because I think you have to develop relationships with the students. You have to get to know them. You have to speak into their lives and develop a relationship with them where you can talk to them and also lay the groundwork to be able to teach them and build into them. So I think that’s the biggest part is relationships. Defining that success is doing that. You can’t expect much a student-athlete, you can expect much from a student in general unless you promote the value in them and I think you do that through relationships, to see what’s going on in their lives.

C: Right and you know I coached for 20+ years too and I know exactly what you are talking about there.

E: The second part of that would be, “Do you believe Grand Valley prepared you for success in the classroom?” You know I go back and look and changing careers and look at your education and undergrad work and then you get back to get certified to teach and you can get all the strategies and you can do all the lesson planning and lesson plan methods and everything like that and all of that is great and it helps you stay organized and I think that’s a huge part in helping you be successful, you have to be organized, but I think when you get in the classroom, can you relate to students? Can you relate to 16, 15, 17 year old kids and speak to their level and kind of work with them? I believe it’s not so much teaching them but I’m working with them to help them grow. It’s kind of a growth mindset. You get them when they walk in. Ok, how are they going to grow? How do you get them to grow and achieve? And I think that’s the fun part of it.

C: Right. Whether you are teaching here or teaching on the field.

E: Yeah, just that. You take them and they have them with a set of skills and how do you hone those skills? How do you work on that? How do you build upon those skills? Through that process they learn, not only your content, but they also learn life lessons, life skills and I think it’s habits. You’re trying to instill one of two habits that they can take with them. You know they’re not going to do everything but if you can give them a little tip or something along the way it can form a habit from it I think it’s going to be beneficial.

C: So you are looking at success in life versus just success in your classroom?

E: It is. I mean you can go into it saying you’re on fire about your content and ultimately they are going to forget a lot of the content but I think if they’re interested in it I think they are going to retain more and again, I think it’s the energy you bring to them to engage the students and I think that’s important to me, the positive energy I bring. Every day I have to be on and otherwise they could feed off that. Being on is just being energetic and a lot of times being quirky with the kids because, frankly, you know, we have to entertain them at some point.

C: Especially if they come off Prom Weekend. (which Eric’s students just did).

E: I mean it’s…on a Monday. How do you get them going? Like today’s topic, how do you get them excited about the Federal budget? There’s a lot of different ways to do that but you have to bring that energy first. I think that’s part of it. You have to have that mindset. You have that positive mindset. “Here’s another day. Ok, here we go.” Because I think if you model that I think they pick up on that.

C: Without a doubt. So with Question 2 and 3 in the last couple of months it might have changed for you a little bit, Question 2, what you do you view as the biggest challenges to your career? What are the things…I don’t necessarily say struggle but you have to think about, “Wow! I have to get this done.”

E: The biggest challenges to my career are when I look at my content and my teaching style I think how do I tweak that, how am I improving? Ways and methods to improve. I think sometimes you get caught up with trying to add this new method or this strategy and I think we get caught up in that. I think teaching goes back to relationships with students. I mean what tools are you using when you are asking students what task are you asking of them? That’s part of this. When you are asking your students, in terms of learning, what are you asking them to do, are some of the tools and strategies? I think some of those good educational strategies do not change. You can tweak them, but I mean what do you expect out of your students? Holding them accountable to those standards. That’s one thing that’s a challenge, that accountability level. If I am holding a student accountable, do I have support to do it? Am I going to get railroaded by an administrator? Is a parent going to pick up a phone and all of a sudden it’s my fault for holding them (the students) for holding them to expectations or holding them accountable?

C: A good thing here, that one class you had 6 or 8 kids who haven’t completed their civic participation thing so if it is going to impact their grade, impact their graduation, that’s a big deal. And if you didn’t have backing on that, then…that’s a nightmare.

E: That’s a nightmare and we have that on some other things too. Attendance is one. I think the biggest challenge for me is the fact that seat time is no longer a factor, is not seen as a factor in a person’s education. I think that’s wrong. There’s so much learning, being in a classroom, being in that setting. I can give them an assignment. I can even tailor it online. I could video myself and all that but there is still a lot of learning that takes place amongst your peers and in that environment. So that’s the biggest challenge is attendance how it’s just kind of dismissed. How it is not that important, it’s not that important anymore. A student can learn anywhere, any time. That’s scary and I’m not shying away from that. I teach a blended learning class so I’m aware of that and I’m kind of gearing myself, I have to make my content and my course relevant and bottom line is I have to make it attractive to students, otherwise they will take it online and I think they will be missing out if they take it online, fully online.

C: I wrote in my notes several times already today how many times you went back to relevancy to their own lives, whether it was in the Civics part of the class or the Econ thing, how’s this reflect, how’s the Federal Budget reflect into your personal budget? How do you make meaning out of it that way. And the same thing with civic participation. I mean this is an important part of your life and you should understand what’s going on here, whether you’re volunteering for a non-profit or going to the city commission meeting.

E: Do you want people making decisions for you or do you want to be involved in that and that’s what I love about Social Studies, how do you want things to happen? Do you want things to happen for you and decisions made for you or do you want to take an active role in that? I think that’s a huge part. I’m trying to get them to take an active role in one, their education, and obviously their civic duty. I try to frame it and joke around for my content. Civics is pretty easy to make those connections. Economics is a little harder, but I want them to be a smart consumer and understand that this stuff is not going to go away. It’s not going to go away.

C: I liked the way you rephrased budget too. You talked about, well, one kid got into Dave Ramsey, but you’re talking about, “This is choices you make for your spending too.” Just to frame it a little bit different in their lives. They might be a little bit more excited about it. They care more.

E: That’s that relevant, “Why budget?” “Ok, great. Ok I don’t have a budget.” Ok, they may not have a budget. A lot of them don’t have budgets. Most of them don’t. The ones who have a job, you want to teach them that skill. “Ok, what are you doing with your money? I don’t know. Well, do you have a plan for what to do with your money? That’s how you stay organized and you’re going to be financially successful if you can do that.”

C: So, like I said, 3, too, what methods have you adopted to deal with the stresses of a challenging career and the caveat I’ve added to everyone of these interviews so far, is ‘nondestructive’ ways to deal with stress in your career?

E: To deal with stress I really believe you have to find the time to turn off your school and turn off your email because we have access to it 24/7 and we have to train ourselves not to have access to it and that’s the hard part. The first thing when I get done (with the day) I want to give my time to my family until my kids go to bed so I want to gear my life around that because if I’m teaching the students that and trying to instill values in them. One, I believe it’s got to start with your relationship with your wife and then your family and for me it’s faith-based, but that’s an important part of an individual, the relationships and the family values at home. I think ultimately that’s the quality of person you are going to be. And then how healthy you are going to be, both physically and mentally. But I think that’s part of it, just being able to shut that off, turn off the phone, not access things. I can say that, but it’s difficult at times because we want to be available but we can’t always be available. I think that’s a good lesson sometimes to teach young people that you don’t always have to…you know.

C: And I noticed you made the one kid put his phone in the box because he wouldn’t detach.

E: And I think that’s been the biggest struggle, the phones and access to cell phones. I think there’s a place for it and I go back and forth and I have a box over there, it’s kind of a “be free”, I don’t have it. They don’t worry about the teacher having it, but I just, “Put your phone somewhere where it’s not a distraction.” Because it is. It’s a distraction and I joke about it, “Be free. Be free from your cell phone” because it’s…it could be a job (to get rid of it or be free from it) for some.

C: You mentioned too that you came in this morning to work out. Several people I talked to already, they say personal exercise, they say as a health, but also a mental way to release, I guess.

E: Yeah, I believe I’m a coach and a teacher and I think that’s a part of it. If I want to, if I need to bring energy to the classroom physically I have to feel that way so finding the time to exercise and work out, I think that’s a big part of it. And the mental side of it too, like I said, to me it’s having that faith component, that’s a big part, spiritual. To me it’s faith in the Lord and that’s part of it, the prayer, and it’s a mindset and it’s a “how you want to live your life”. I think having that moral compass helps me keeps things aligned. Helps me set my boundaries. It helps me set my priorities versus anything and that’s personally what I believe.

C: So Question 4 is a motivation question. We are talking long haul, day to day, year to year, what keeps you motivated?

E: What keeps me motivated? I look at it day to day, long haul, there’s things I am doing in my classroom that may not have an impact today but down the road I’m hoping it has a long term impact on the lives of one of my students. Will I see that? I may never see that, and that’s ok. I don’t need to see that. I get gratification for…I just do the best I can and trying to motivate students to be successful human beings and successful citizens and be successful in every aspect of their lives. I teach subjects like Civics and Economics where I can talk about even relationships and how that impacts financial success or impacts their role as a citizen. I think that helps me. I think any time I can share just knowledge and wisdom and, like I said, “Here’s my two cents, soapbox, here’s my two cents. You can take one and throw in into a fountain and take one and ride the penny horse at Meijer.” That’s what I tell my guys and I tell my students all the time. “So you do what you want with these two cents and I’ll get off my soapbox in a minute.” You have opportunities like that to give them perspective. And to me I always try to provide a rationale for my students. I always say, “This is the rationale for this”, either from my experience or what I’ve seen in students and I try to provide that rationale so it’s not just, “Well, here he goes again.” “Here’s some other advice.”

C: Do you think that’s a hallmark and be honest with me, of Social Studies teachers? That they have that kind of perception of the world or reacting with other staff and other subject areas do you think that’s just teaching in general?

E: Social Studies, we always joke about it in our staff meetings and just the way we interact and the way we get things done. It’s different when you talk about teachers in other staff meetings and when they look at content and things. I don’t know, maybe by nature that’s kind of how we are. I think we work well with others because I think, I don’t know, you’re right, it is part of our curriculum. It’s a big part of it.

C: It’s outside the area of this study but it has me thinking about maybe it’s ingrained in people deciding about being Social Studies educators.

E: I think maybe it’s in our curriculum you have more flexibility to do more with some things. You know you can take a lesson on the Federal Budget and you can go a variety of ways with it and hopefully come back with a basic understanding of it. Where Math, maybe you are limited.

C: You don’t get into moral questions (with Math) or Supreme Court cases that provides…

E: My first hour class today a student could walk out and say, “We didn’t do anything in there.” “Well, yeah, you discussed.” I think that’s the hard part. We have to assess students qualitatively quite a bit. That’s the paper student. The student who turns in work but I go, “How are you in the classroom? How are you in discussing? Do you add to the classroom environment?” That’s what has changed a little bit. And how I look at teaching, I put value in that (the classroom as discussion seminar), more than sometimes what they have written down or turned in written work.

C: Question #5 and then I think we will end to give you some time (this part of the interview was during Eric’s prep period and I didn’t want him to sacrifice all this time for me.) What changes have occurred in the methods and strategies that you have used in your classroom? And I noticed you opened up Moodle and got right after the technology.

E: Technology continues to be, you can’t shy away from that. I think your course has to be available to students online somewhat. That they can access the course content. And I think the use of media in some aspect with my blended class, having lessons through that because the students are doing that for entertainment (using tech) so it allows them to be educated in the same way, whether it be YouTube videos or podcasts. There’s a lot of things. They go to it to learn and become educated but as I tell my students, “Just because you can access it doesn’t mean you know it or doesn’t mean you have learned it. Just because you have access to all this information doesn’t mean you know it. Let alone learned or can apply it.” We can put all that on Moodle for them. They can access to it but are they learning it? Can they apply it? And I think that’s our job and I think with Social Studies, a lot of times, it is a reflection of it. It’s the reflection type questions. Not so much where you get a desired answer but it’s their reaction to something. How they are going to reflect on it; either a Supreme Court decision or how they are going to reflect on a spending choice by the government.

C: And I also noted that I can’t recall a single question you asked that was basically just information based in total. You were always trying to pursue a reflection question, think deeper thoughts, deeper thinking about what you’re talking about. Historically in the past I think there were lots of teachers that and there is still teachers, depending on the content, they are just, “You have to know this” versus “What do you know about this?” Do you think that is a change too?

E: I think that’s a change but I do a lot more with groups and I do a lot more where I have to give the students authority for their own learning. I give them assignments where they are grouping. I give them a task and a direction and I’m way over here so I have to let them choose to learn. Sometimes I’ll guide those conversations but again they could be having a whole different conversation but again I have to let that go. I think that is what has changed a little bit. I have to start evaluating students on that, having more discussion based and that type of learning versus where they are working independent. And just the idea of collaboration. Trying to define that for them. Working in groups and how do you define that? They are going to have to do that for the rest of their lives for the most part unless they choose a career (that doesn’t involve group work or collaboration) but chances are they could be working with a computer or something by themselves, however, but they are going to encounter people. There’s not many things you can do that you don’t encounter other people.

C: Very few that I can think of. So if you don’t know how to collaborate you are hamstrung a little bit.

E: And you have to be careful that you don’t do too much because then they relay on, “I don’t have to do my own independent thinking” so that’s how we gear things.

C: So when you started your career you have seen much change over time in that? You’ve basically been collaborative…?

E: I have stepped into more collaborative. You know how you set up your classroom. You set up in groups or pods. Even group activities or assessments, you want to have some aspect of that in your class where they, what are they going to produce? And then have students evaluate other students. I think that is something I have changed. I think in my learning and in my continuing ed and I am looking at some of that. So I’m looking at students analyze other students, peer assessments and things of that nature. I think they learn quite a bit from that.

C: Yeah, I do too.

E: The process, one of the things, the process is valuable and two, I think when they are analyzing the work I think they learn quite a bit. They are also reflecting on, “Is that good or bad or why was that good or bad? This is the level of work, why does this deserve this grade versus this?” Plus it can set a new standard for themselves too.

C: Because they can see what others or doing and they may be rising…

E: We just did the same project and we had them all do a gallery walk and analyze the student work and they see, “Oh, yeah, that was a better way to do that. Oh, yeah, I didn’t think about that.” So they are learning, even though they just completed the assignment. They could easily complete it and turn it in to me and I could give it back to them but I would prefer the learning continue. Which is another reason I go around and I stamp. I like to go physically, go to students’ desk and try to check assignments, if I can. There are some things they have to turn in but I really something I find value in that connection with students on a daily basis.

C: Are they awarded credit for the stamp?

E: Yeah. And they have to turn that in, just like the other turn in assignments. It’s just a place to hold that when they turn in the organizational chart. The stamp represents completion.

C: And the organizational chart just something you do or?

E: Yeah, it’s just something I do in here and I got from a teacher in the past. I just kept it.

C: What types of assessments, both informal and formal, are used to assess your classroom teaching and that’s the administration assessing you, and how are these evaluations used to better your teaching?

E: Evaluations, this is the biggie. Some of the…right now we are on Marzano evaluation system and it is talking about, as far formal evaluations, about drop-ins. That’s basically one way formal observation is to evaluate my teaching so my principal dropping in and seeing what I do and in the amount of time they are there, observing an entire lesson. Other drop-ins to look for classroom instruction and organization and things of that nature. So sometimes he will just drop-in for 5 or 10 minutes and then leave and they are making notes on what they observe. And more so on the formal observations and the big thing with the Marzano, it is all about adding stuff and putting things in “buckets” and to me I kind have been disenfranchised by the Marzano system because I just felt like, I’m trying to prove everything I am doing and tie it to the standards that they want and just, it has got to connect to some of the strands that they want have in there. So it is a matter of me compiling the information and demonstrating what I am doing in these specific areas. So “Engaging students”, so that would be one example. What am I doing to engage students. If the principal isn’t observing me doing that then I have to show what I have been doing to engage my students in the classroom. So I guess it would be doing lesson plans, assigning them, providing them data or evidence of what I have been doing to engage students in class, whether it be activities or strategies. So that was be kind of one that without them observing it, they would need evidence of that. It was us compiling the evidence and placing it in the proper place and a lot of times it is just “buckets” is what they are referring to and I call it “drop in the buckets” and things of that nature and it is a newer system and we are working out the bugs and how to apply it.

C: How long? How new is “new”?

E: How new as far as that Marzano system is it is our second year so we are just learning the vernacular and then looking at learning goals and scales and trying to assess one student’s growth. And there is some good things in there. It is just, again, with a system it is applied differently across from one principal to the next and it is applied differently across districts. You can learn something but it is all about the application of it. It is not the system that is going to make the teachers better. It’s how you use the system, how you use those tools to foster that growth or improvement in the profession. It’s a work in progress, I guess I would say right now. It’s a system that TBAISD has supported and by them supporting it the district has jumped on board and we all kind of learning as we go.

C: You said two things there that other people have commented on. Number 1: It is who applies the instrument and there is variation just be the nature of, it may be somewhat quantitative but it is a lot qualitative too so now it’s interpretation of how the model is being applied and then, I think, not contrary to some opinion, and I don’t think it is provable fact, it is not just the system itself that makes things change, but it is the application of what you learn off of that which leads into the second part of the question: It’s only been two years but you can also talk about the evaluation system before Marzano, do you feel the school’s evaluations have improved your teaching? Helped?

E: There has been a few. The more…the time that administrators have to actually sit down and do that and actually spend with you, it’s gone. They don’t have the time to do that. Some of my best evaluations were a long time ago when I felt the principal had the time to teach me some of those things, give me insight. Some of the best evaluation I get is from colleagues and things of that nature and just having them observe and discuss and looking at student work and things like that. That is some of the best evaluation that I have been able to grow from is working with colleagues, but again, I believe everyone does need a boss. I believe there’s that motivation where you need someone to push and steer you and push you and challenge you to get better in certain areas. I think everyone needs that. I don’t think any teacher is crazy to think that they have it all figured out and they don’t need that. I think that’s important. So it just becomes how you apply that and it just goes back to your relationship with your administrator. Do you feel that 1: they are using that evaluation tool to improve your teaching or is it a “Gotcha! You didn’t do this and you did it this way versus this. Can you explain why?” I guess it is the approach that what is the point of the tool you are using? If the point that teacher is growing, get better. I think it is just how it is applied.

C: Interestingly, the two people who have gone into administration, the guy in Oscoda and the guy at West Ottawa, he started teaching at Lowell, they claim, as administrators that that is their goal, is, “How can I improve you as a teacher?” Because the better the teaching staff the better the school.

E: That’s true. Awesome.

C: So they “get it”. It seems they get it, but other teachers have commented with the change in the tenure law and especially if there is a forced reduction in staff due to decreasing student enrollment then it may be a “Gotcha” event. “I can use the fact that maybe you’re not…what’s the highly…

E: Highly qualified.

C: Highly qualified.

E: Highly Effective.

C: Highly effective. Gives them the room to say, “Well, ok, We can dump a senior member of our faculty that costs us a lot of money because we need to do reduction in force anyhow.”

E: Effective versus highly effective and that’s, there’s that window of what makes effective to highly effective. I guess it gets back to the evaluator I bet.

C: Right.

E: You may prove in certain categories, “Ok, in this category, for whatever reason, you are not highly effective.”

C: What types of mentoring were provided for you and how would you characterize the results of mentoring that was provided for you? If it was provided?

E: It was provided early on. The mentoring process was provided early on by another teacher and I learned quite a bit when I just got started. Just having a mentor to talk to and work through things. It was mostly curriculum based and there was also strategies, organizational strategies. I think that is an important part of (teaching success). So there was that teacher/mentor relationship. I did have one assigned to me and I had a pretty good one who actually cared about it. Cared about their job versus just the money or stipend that came with it. I felt it was valuable to learn from him at the time. The guy I student-taught for, as well, was instrumental in the mentoring process. He let me do a lot on my own and you learn through experiences mainly. But I think he provided some experience and he allowed me to go and actually I had a student teacher myself and I kind of learned and you kind of set up your structure but the student teacher is not you. Just gives them flexibility to give them what they want to do with the subject matter, the content, whatever it may be.

C: I always told my student teachers and, I had seven of them over 24 years in Kansas, that I wanted to learn from them. “What did you learn new, both in content and pedagogy, that you could bring to my classroom?” And they would set up a lesson, once they took over my classes and I would teach what they set up, which they took that to heart, saying, “Ok, this guy is going to trust me to do something good.”

E: I would agree. There’s lessons that the student teacher taught that I still use because I think it’s a great lesson for, a great way to present the information and maybe something that I wasn’t, I didn’t think about or I didn’t have time to adapt or tweak or, but just a fresh new idea. A similar topic or a new way of doing something.

C: So, based on what you said, with both these last questions, you had some value from the formal, or do still, from the formal evaluation process and from your formal mentor, but also the collaboration with colleagues has been important too.

E: Yeah. We were part of, and, one, I was part of “Critical Friend” group at the time. It was a consortium, part of a Federal grant we were part of, so I was able to do a lot that and analyzing student work from that perspective and focusing on teacher collaboration and observing other teachers and I think I learned quite a bit from that process. I think if you are involved in that and you can get the time to do that that’s great. Process development is, the kind you can have a hand in developing, that is the most significant and instrumental in your growth and I think if it’s forced upon you, one, you have to see the value in it. Sometimes you have to create the value in it. “Ok, I have to do this so I will make my time valuable.” Even though you might want to do something else so but again, I think it’s the same thing. You have to get on board with a vision sometimes even though you don’t fully agree with it. Whether it be district or school-wide or the principal saying, “Can you help me with this?”

C: And that sort of leads into the next question, the first number 8 (Microsoft re-numbered the question sheet after I added a question), have you pursued continuing and, do you have a Master’s?

E: Yeah.

C: And either in the form of a graduate program or professional development and how has this education influenced your success in the classroom? And you implied or said directly that some of the professional development has been generated by you or other teachers has been more useful to you in the classroom than maybe a top-down approach.

E: Yeah, and maybe from a district perspective, we are tweaking things, always trying to change and it’s not always, you can’t ever seem to ‘stay the course’ so much with what we are trying to do. We tried to do an “academy model” and that fell by the wayside very quickly but I remember just devoting a lot of time and energy to it and things of that nature. So we have seen the typical, the new, I’m trying to think of it, either a new method or, like you said, a new way of teaching, come and go, a new initiative. It seems to come and go, or there is money behind it, a grant behind it and whatever the length of time, it’s gone. So you see that a lot. To me, you can look at it and, “Here’s another, here’s something new. We don’t want to do it for new sake.” But I try to gain something from it. While it’s there. We do put a lot of time into that, curriculum development into that new initiative, whatever it may be. It’s not often curriculum but it’s philosophy.

C: Yeah, and it’s like the football coach talking about “passing bubbles” or how they use “isos” and you can say, “Ok, that’s their philosophy but here is something we can actually use and apply.” I remember one of the first (football) clinics I went to when I went out to Kansas was the OU clinic. And here’s Barry Switzer telling us how they play OU football and he’s got All-Americans at about every position.

E: “This is how we do it.”

C: “We just run over people.” Well, that’s nice. Or, “We use this technique” and it’s not going to work in a small high school because we don’t have those kids.

E: It’s good to acquire that knowledge but is it applicable?

C: But then, every once in a while you do find something that, “Ok, this could work for us.”

E: Right. And that’s why I think you just be open to that and we always want to tweak and it doesn’t seem to be any time to do it. The time to, “Ok, right now I have projects to grade or I have tests to grade.” And then what? And then I look at my curriculum so when do we have time to tweak the curriculum? On the weekend or at night? At night at the expense of my family? I don’t know. (Ben Watson said he would not sacrifice family time for his job.) That’s where I think it can wear on you if you are not careful. It’s a big part of it.

C: Without a doubt.

E: Priorities and balancing your time.

C: “Pearls of Wisdom”. Here you can wax or sermonize. What would you tell current students to make sure they know before they start teaching? In other words, what do you wish you knew before you left GVSU and your teacher certification program and started your career? Where did I mess up, Eric? (He had me for two classes at Traverse City.)

E: Where did you mess up? Pearls of Wisdom. You know I think you, one, you want to be passionate about your profession. You have to be passionate about what you want to do. You have to go into it with the mindset, “Ok, what is my intent?” To impact the next generation? And it’s not so much content related but it is just relationally. What can you speak into that? What can you build into the lives of these young people? Because hopefully that’s the goal for incoming teachers. Because you can choose a career that provides money and provides some of those financial securities but are you gaining value out of what you do on a daily basis? Do you feel at the end of the day, “Hey, I’ve given back” or “I really enjoy what I do even though it’s hectic. Even though you have several things to do at one time but, at the end of the day, if you are into it for the right reasons and you are making a positive impact on people’s lives then I think that’s why you want to go into the teaching profession, first and foremost. And there is an energy that comes from a classroom full of students. There’s an energy every single day and people say we are driven by a bell. We have a schedule that is very constricted in a sense that you know you have to be here at this time. You have to be ready at this time, go to the bathroom at this time, eat lunch at this time. It’s all carved out for you so all that time is carved out for you but knowing that and being prepared for when that time is carved out and providing, getting that information from them or not so much information, but feeding off that energy and trying to ignite that energy and use it to your benefit. Because they want to learn. They are here for the right reasons. Most students are here for the right reasons, even the ones who probably don’t care, that’s you’re job to engage them. Whatever that level of engagement might be. I think the challenge is, with 30 some students in a class, trying to do that the best possible way you can. And just knowing that you can’t do it all. My wife tells me all the time, “You can’t do it all.” You might not touch 33 students and you might even impact one that you really wanted to but at least you know you tried and you never know, you may have impacted him and like I said before, you’re not going to know that ‘til…you may never know that.

C: Or years down the road.

E: Or years down the road. I miss him, I wish…so that’s the mindset you want when you go into (teaching) so.

C: And it’s hard.

E: And it’s hard and failure is ok because the next day you can come in and do it again or learn from that mistake. It’s like a…I just had a…we had a good breakfast the other day of…one of the speakers came in and we had mentors and dads’ players breakfast and other athletes and one of the guys that spoke, I asked him to speak, he basically gave a quote that, “Only those who dare to fail greatly, achieve greatly”. And that’s how I look at things. (I pointed to a Vince Lombardi quote on a poster in the back of his room.) Yeah, another good quote back there. And that was by Tony Dungy so, “Dare to fail greatly and achieve greatly” and it’s just the idea to try things, try things new and there’s always the next day to come in and improve upon that.

C: Good “Pearl”. That’s fine. That’s teaching. That’s life. (I commented when a student from earlier in the day came in to hand in some homework that he was admonished to complete.) Anything else that you want to add to “Pearls of Wisdom”? I mean that’s, you did a good job, but I don’t want to cut you off.

E: No, on “Pearls of Wisdom”, you know, boy, there’s, just the opportunity to share all the nuggets.

C: You can always email me too and I can add it to it because it’s been a long day. It doesn’t look like it’s going to get any shorter either. (Eric was working hard to prepare for the end of the school year and his upcoming year as the new head football coach.)

E: It feels that way. It felt like a long day today. It really has at this point. Every minute was boom, boom, boom, boom.

C: We can go to Question 9 (really Question 10), is there anything you would like to add that I didn’t ask.

E: About your teaching career?

C: Yeah.

E: Yeah, I think one thing that you get in this profession to do, you’re in this profession, don’t think you’re going to get in and think you’re going to be a 7:40 to 3:05. I think if you’re getting in this profession because you like the hours or the schedule then that’s the wrong reason to get in the profession. I think you want to be involved, as a teacher I think you need to be involved in the school and in the school community and do other things. Certainly it’s going to help your employment. It’s going to help you stay hired they think. Also it goes back to relationships with students. If the students see you involved in coaching or volunteering or running a club or being available in organized or not organized, but being available in a part of their lives outside of the classroom I think you gain more respect inside the classroom and outside of the classroom. I just think it helps you to develop relationships with the students. They see you in a different light. You get to work with them in an area where maybe you choose a sport or you choose a club you see their interest there. They are there because of their interest in that sport or club or organization so that’s a neat thing to do something outside of their own school day. So again, you can pour into their lives some more and I think that’s ultimately what you want to do. At the end of that when you are on your death bed you want to be able to say, “Hey, it was all about relationships and I wanted to make an impact, a positive impact on young people and people I come into contact with.” And I think if you can say that then you’ve lived a good life and that would be a great way to go out.

C: I agree. I totally agree.

E: If that’s a possibility and that doesn’t stop. I don’t think that ever stops. I think a great lesson from my dad. He continues to do it. I think people today, they retire and they kind of do their own thing and waste away but there goes a lot of knowledge and expertise and my dad has continues to mentor and work with young people because he’s not done. He’s just…I think that’s a great model and a great lesson for everyone. I really have a hard time with teachers who are counting days and years. They are in here and they say, “Man, I have 10 years or I have 6 years until I can retire” and I’m like, “Get out now!” I don’t want to hear that.

C: Yeah, if that is all you are living for.

E: If that’s all you are living for, that’s, man. Look in the mirror and say, “Man, I have to get out now and go do something else.” Because you are not doing anyone any favors. I never want to be that individual and, or I won’t be that individual.

C: I don’t think you will, Eric.

E: If someone ever…If I ever start saying that, someone should slap me upside the head. “Get out now!” I never want to count days so I can retire.

C: I did want to leave my high school job, in a way, but I also still miss it and I still make contact with the athletes I coached and the people I taught with and when it comes down to leaving Grand Valley it will be, “Ok, what do I get to do next?”

E: Right. What’s the next adventure? That works.

C: Thank you very much.