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A STATE OF UNFAIRS: A CASE STUDY CONCERNING RESPECT FOR TEACHERS IN OKLAHOMA

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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Lovingly dedicated to my family. I've worked very hard, and you've been with me every step along my journey. I hope you are as proud of this as I am.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to examine if and how Oklahoma teachers are disrespected within their profession. This study incorporates an online survey and in-depth interviewing to attempt to address the respect/disrespect teacher in Oklahoma might feel and where the lack of respect might be coming from (i.e. students, lawmakers, administrators). These feelings of disrespect, reported by the teachers online and during interviews, are tied into the early years of teaching and analyzed in terms of historical context and potential gender bias. This study concludes with suggestions of how to decrease feelings of disrespect among teachers.

Introduction

During the course of my educational career, both as a student behind a desk and crossing the wide, flowing river into becoming an educator myself, I have spent a significant amount of time with teachers. I have possibly spent more time with teachers than I have with my significant other; maybe even more time than with my own parents. I have only ever wanted to be a teacher. Yet, there are things about teaching that no one—not my mentors, not my teachers, not even my own mother—told me before I began studying education. As I crossed the metaphoric Nile River of educational theory, curricula, and classroom management on my entrance into the profession, I began to realize that there is as sort of black cloud, like Los Angeles' smog, that overhangs the teaching profession. To say it simply, teachers feel disrespected.

What began as a simple case study to determine exactly what made Oklahoma teachers feel so disrespected became, for me, a history lesson about the teaching profession and a self-guided journey into my own understanding of what is truly means to be a teacher. The purpose of this study, by gaining some understanding of what causes Oklahoma teachers to feel disrespected and by exploring the history of teaching, is to perhaps arrive at some remedy for the sickness that is the current state of public education, which is most certainly caused by teachers feeling disrespected. Therefore, my study will attempt to answer several research questions:

- To what degree do Oklahoma teachers feel respected/disrespected within their profession?
- What is causing Oklahoma teachers to feel as if they are disrespected?
- What, if any, movements in the history of teaching are related to the disrespect of modern teachers in Oklahoma?
- What can be done to make Oklahoma teachers feel respected?

Chapter Overview and Structure

As the typical thesis structure did not allow for the relative freedom required for the multiple layers of this study, it is necessary, perhaps, to provide a type of general layout of the chapters contained within this study, as well as the general topics covered in each. I will initially discuss all of the mechanics of my study, including the full methodology, an introduction to the teachers interviewed for the case study, any biases or problems I have had or could foresee having with the data collected, and a brief overview of the findings of this study. All of this information will be contained in the following sections of the introduction.

After the Introduction, I will begin a discussion of the history of teaching, the results of my study (in more depth), and an analysis of how the two relate. The chapters will roughly follow the chronology of the history of teaching in America from Colonial times until the first World War. I have chosen this time period specifically because this is when the most dramatic changes in teaching emerged.

The first chapter will cover the feminization of teaching, which begins to take effect between the full establishment of the thirteen British Colonies in

America and just before the Civil War (roughly between the 1770s and the 1860s). This period is when teaching truly became a "female's" profession. In this chapter, I will link the history of teaching to modern teaching through the concept of "moral education." Essentially, I will look at how early public schooling placed female teachers into this double bind of "the angel of the schoolhouse," as far as being cast as the perfect sex to educate children, and yet being scrutinized at every turn for educating children. I will then discuss how this historic disrespect translates into modern teaching in the form of the perpetual struggle between parents and teachers over the "moral" education of children, backing up my analysis with the opinions of actual Oklahoma teachers.

The second chapter will follow a similar pattern as the first: beginning with a discussion of a particular movement in the history of teaching and its immediate effects on female teachers and ending with a discussion of the modern effects of these movements and how modern teachers react to and exist within those effects. This chapter, which will overlap slightly with the first and the third chapters, will discuss female teachers venturing westward to teach, many following the "call." This chapter will discuss the "call" as both a reason to teach and as a teacher trap which keeps women in the profession. Looking at the modern parallel, I will discuss how teachers are now feeling the "call" to leave teaching behind or to leave the state of Oklahoma behind. I will specifically discuss how what was once seen as a spiritual or religious call to action has turned toward a monetary call away from the profession.

Chapter Three will look closely at the white, northern, female teachers who flocked South after the end of the Civil War in order to teach formerly enslaved African Americans and how those women were disrespected for wanting to teach the "other." Currently, this trend of disrespect continues; however, the "other" now are students who are English Language Learners (ELL/ESL), students in need of Special Education (SPED), or, in general, extracurricular subjects, like music, art, or Physical Education (PE). These teachers, much like their predecessors, do not feel the support of the community, the school system, or even their peers, as my collected data will show.

Chapter Four will look at the bureaucratization of the teaching profession, which takes place mostly between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. This is a period in which regulations began to be placed on the curriculum of public schools. The drive toward a nationalized curriculum both increased the quality of teachers and limited the instructional freedom of teachers through intense observations and strict regulations. In the 21st century, public education has seen another great push for a nationalized curriculum and the advent of the national and state standardized test, which causes many of the same restrictions that early teachers felt alongside a crippling feeling of disrespect from administrators and lawmakers.

The final chapter covers the period of time from roughly the middle of the push for bureaucratization to the start of America's involvement in World War I. The working conditions for teachers during this time were, as they saw them, unacceptable, and so began the movement among female teachers to unionize in

order to attain fair treatment, better pay, and regulated working conditions (i.e. schools that were not in disrepair). In Oklahoma, similar conditions are beginning to accumulate for modern teachers, who are complaining of being overworked, undercompensated, and stuck in unsafe, overcrowded, mismanaged school buildings. This level of disrespect and basic neglect is beginning to cause a stir among modern teachers; many of them are searching for political ways--unionization, striking, voting, campaigning--to overcome these unacceptable conditions.

Finally, I will conclude my study with a discussion of how to make teachers feel more respected in the state of Oklahoma. I will look at suggestions from Oklahoma teachers, as well as suggestions from education scholars. With this, I can hopefully propose some reasonable goals for teachers and for the public in Oklahoma.

Definitions

The term “respect” is tricky to define because it can mean many different things to many different teachers, and it can look very differently coming from different students. For the purposes of this study, respect will be defined utilizing the suggestions of the case study teachers. For many teachers, respect from their students means that the students are actively paying attention in the classroom and do not talk over the teacher or interrupt while he/she is instructing. Respect from the parents of their students means that the parents take an active role in the education of their students by being attentive to their student’s needs and the

concerns of the teacher. Respect from administrators means an open acknowledgement of the intelligence and qualifications of the teacher by allowing teachers to be involved in the decision-making process and to maintain control within their own classroom. Respect from lawmakers means that they have the best interest of the education system in mind when they make vital decisions, like those concerning curriculum, standardized testing, and teacher pay.

Teacher respect for themselves and for their peers should also be defined. This type of respect generally is basic respect for yourself and for the accomplishments and good qualities of others.

"Respect," as far as teachers are concerned, is simply just to be treated as educated professionals and as knowledgeable educational experts by all other non-teacher parties involved in the process of public education.

Methodology

The whole of this study is split into two distinct parts: the survey and the case study. I first launched the online survey (which I will be a bit more specific as to the methods involved later in this section). I used the responses I received from the survey prior to my interviews with the case study participants to inform me about the general attitudes of teachers in this state, and to help me to shape my semi-structured interview questions into what I believed would prompt coherent and productive discussions.

Overall, the survey was simple. It consisted of ten questions; two were multiple-choice demographic questions concerning length of teaching career and

district type in which the survey-taker teaches, one Likert scale question concerning how respected/disrespected the survey-taker feels, one ranking question in which the survey-taker could choose the most to the least disrespectful group of people (i.e. administrator, parents, students, etc), and six open-ended questions in which the survey-taker could voice their opinions about various aspects of respect for teachers in Oklahoma. The exact questions can be found in Appendix A.

I created and launched this survey via an online survey builder, Survey Monkey. I believed that utilizing social media would be the most efficient way to recruit survey participants, so I posted my survey (along with the appropriate recruitment script and other paperwork) on Facebook. I posted my survey to a specific Facebook page for Oklahoma English Language Arts educators, which has around 2,500 members and to my own personal account, which would be seen by about 50 people (educators and non-educators). I received a total of 108 responses to the survey.

As for the case study portion, it was important to engage in interviews with teachers who both represented the varied districts in Oklahoma and who objectively had "enough" experience as an educator in Oklahoma to be able to provide interesting and purposeful insights into the overall situation of public education in Oklahoma. I chose to interview three teachers total. Each teacher currently taught in a different type of district: urban, rural, and suburban. I interviewed each teacher over the phone two times, for roughly thirty minutes and then for roughly an hour. The first interview was a cold interview, in which the

teachers were not given a list of topics to be discussed or questions to be asked. I simply wanted to get an idea of their career in teaching and gauge what they perceived as the biggest form of disrespect in their own experiences. I did provide a list of questions/topics prior to the second interview. The purpose of this interview was to explore previously discussed topics on a deeper level and to discuss possible solutions to what they had indicated were Oklahoma's "problems" with/within the teaching profession.

In addition to the interviews, I asked the teachers to complete a visual representation of what they believed respect for teachers should look like and to keep a journal during the period of time between the two interviews. I allowed two weeks between the first and second interview to allow time for reflection for the teachers and time for preparation for me. The journaling exercise was to help the teachers to debrief and to further explore how and when they see disrespect toward themselves or toward teachers. The full interviews can be found in Appendix B, the visual representations in Appendix C, and the journal entries in Appendix D.

Meet the Teachers

I recruited each of these teachers in various ways (i.e. convenience sampling) and found each of their widely differing opinions interesting and valuable. After completing the interviews, I feel as if I truly got to know each of these teachers. Although I respect their opinions and support their right to give them, I have opted to protect their identities by utilizing pseudonyms. Each of

these teachers was kind and polite (nearly to the detriment of my interviews); however, some of the topics discussed could shed a negative light on the school districts and/or administrations to which they are employed. Because of this, I decided to be very cautious about revealing any identifying, non-general information.

The first teacher I asked to be interviewed, Ms. Dee, was recruited by way of our own personal association. She and I were acquainted during one of my teaching experiences. Without being too specific, I will say that she served as a counterpart to my position. We were part of the same teaching team and dealt with many of the same students. When I began this survey, I knew I would ask her to be interviewed for several reasons, the most important being that she teaches at a very large, urban school in a large, urban district.

Ms. Dee is a fairly new teacher. She just barely meets my qualification of tenure having only taught (at the time of interview) for three years and an additional semester. She is young (late 20s), petite, white, and blonde, a far cry from most of the students she teaches. Ms. Dee stands out among her inner-city, mostly Hispanic students. I was very curious to see if this had any effect upon how respected she felt, which we discussed at length in our interviews. Additionally, Ms. Dee has only ever taught in this urban school, and I wondered if that would make her optimistic or if she would be on the brink of burn-out. Students provided her with the most disrespect in her perspective.

The second teacher sought me out to be interviewed. Along with my online survey, I asked the Facebook group if any suburban teachers were willing

to be interviewed, and Ms. Allison responded quickly. During our first interview, she told me why she wanted to be involved in my study, and—to be candid—what she told me assured me without a doubt that she was exactly right for this study. About teaching she said, "It used to be when kids would tell me that they wanted to be a teacher, I was so proud of them. But now, so few of them ever say that, but when they do, I want to almost discourage them...but I also don't want to discourage them because we've got to have somebody. And that's one of the reasons I agreed to do this [be interviewed] because, gosh, if you're interested at all, I've got to do my part to help. It's all about the students." After learning of her varied teaching experiences--including many different districts and another state--and her complete outspokenness against the limitations placed on teachers by standardized testing and the push for a nationalized curriculum, I wanted Ms. Allison to become a linchpin in my case study.

The third teacher was chosen to participate based upon the "snowball" method of collecting participants. I am sorry to say that I don't know many teachers in rural areas, so I asked my mother, who has been teaching in my rural hometown for nearly 20 years, for a recommendation. She chose Ms. Robinson, a tough, no-nonsense veteran teacher in her 60s who has taught in the same rural school for her entire teaching career of twenty-seven years. Ms. Robinson offered an amazing insight into Oklahoma's most common type of district, commenting mostly on the "small town" quality of her position. As she told me many times during our conversations, she had the most difficulty receiving respect and support from the parents of her students.

Each of these teachers represented, for me, the "every teacher." Their experiences seemed so strikingly similar to those expressed by the online survey-takers and most teachers I have come into contact with. While they certainly cannot represent the experiences of all Oklahoma teachers, I felt like each of these teachers represented the overall "average" experience of teachers from different types of districts and with different levels of teaching experience.

Biases and Limitations in this Study

I must admit that, having such an investment in teaching, I did enter this study with a slight bias. Based upon my personal interactions with Oklahoma teachers, I assumed that they felt disrespected. My goal in this study was to discover why they felt disrespected. I did, however, attempt to keep my bias removed from my questioning both in the online survey and in the interviews. I attempted to ask broad, open-ended questions that could be answered in an affirming way, in a declining way, or in an undecided way. Generally, the responses suggested that most teachers felt respected in some ways and with some people and felt disrespected in some ways and with some people. Very few of my respondents reported feeling disrespected in every aspect.

There are two limitations to this study that undoubtedly have not gone unnoticed. First, I did know and have contact with two of the interviewees prior to this study. While the argument could be made that these prior relationships could have influenced the outcome of the interviews, I would argue that it absolutely did so, but only in a positive way. Because geographic distance and travel restrictions

demanded that all interviews be given by phone, there was no occasion for the "meet and greet" period that is often the ice breaker before any interview. The prior relationships I had with two of the three interviewees eliminated the need for any additional "comfort" period, and allowed, instead, for an open, honest dialogue between us. However, admitting that I made the acquaintances of these women prior to this interview is not to say that I had any indication of what their responses to my questions or perceptions about respect for teachers would be. In truth, this topic had never before been broached as the subject of conversation with either of the interviewees before they were interviewed for this study.

Secondly, this study is heavily framed from the experience of female teachers. I do acknowledge that a gap within my study concerns the perspective of male teachers. However, I chose to focus only on female teachers for several reasons, one being that the teaching profession is dominated by women. According to a national survey, 84% of the 3.2 million teachers in the U.S. are women; meaning that the female experience of teaching *is* the experience of teaching. (Feistritzer, 2011). Another reason is that women are an oppressed group, who are largely discriminated against and disrespected; thusly, one can assume that any profession which was female-dominated to this degree would certainly be disrespected in a tangible sense. The final reason I chose to focus on women is for the purpose of my own relationship to and experience with teaching. I, being a woman, am more likely to relate to female teachers, historical and modern, and to see my own experiences or potential experiences similarly to theirs.

The Findings (Briefly)

It is important, before launching into the responses of the interviews and online survey in more depth, to discuss the results of the demographic questions and the Likert scale question of the survey. This will help to give some sort of idea of how the data collected during this survey aligns with the demographics of teachers nationally. While it would be ideal to compare this study's data to that of data specifically concerning Oklahoma teachers, no such dataset exists. Only data concerning the demographics of Oklahoma students is available to the public.

The first survey question asked teachers to provide information concerning how long they had been teaching. Out of 108 total respondents, 31 percent said they had been teaching five years or less, 16 percent fell into the six to 10-year range, 19 percent had been teaching between 11 and 15 years, 19 percent had been teaching between 16 and 20 years, and the final 17 percent said that they had been teaching for more than 20 years. In 2011, the teaching experience of teachers nationally was distributed like this: 26 percent had 1-5 years of teaching experience, 16 percent had 6 to 9 years, 16 percent had 10 to 14 years, 23 percent had 15 to 24 years, and the remaining 17percent had more than 25 years (Feistritzer, 2011). While not identical, and also accounting for changes that could have taken place over five years, the respondents to this study's online survey resemble the national results closely enough for me to feel comfortable suggesting that my dataset is representative of all Oklahoma teachers.

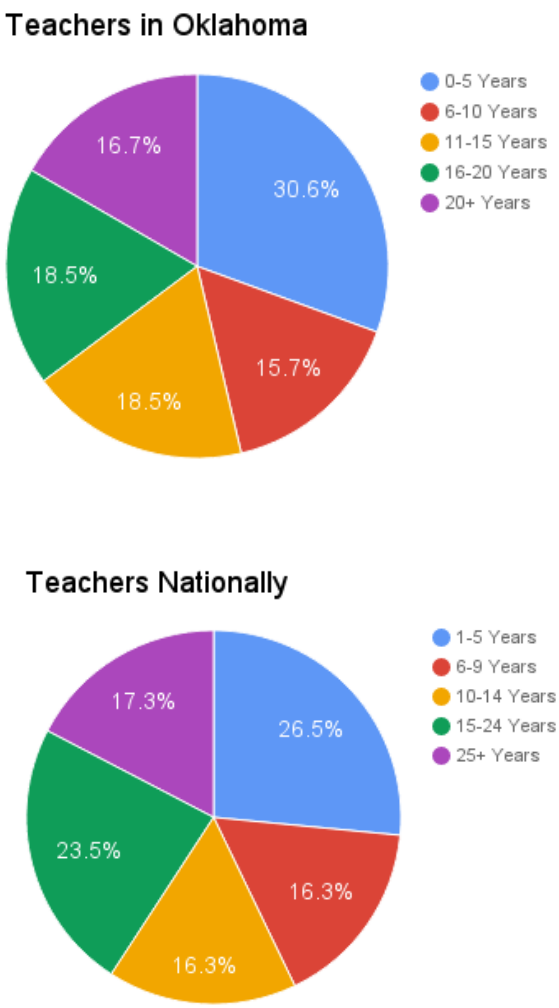


Figure 1: Charts comparing the demographic makeup of teachers in Oklahoma to teachers nationally.

When prompted to state which type of district they worked for, 14 percent of this study's survey respondents said urban, 32 percent said suburban, 52 percent said rural, and 2 percent would not or could not answer. The same question nationally broke down in the following manner: 31 percent work in an urban district, 26 percent work in a suburban district, and 42 percent of teachers teach in a rural district (Feistritzer, 2011). While these two datasets are not as

close, I would suggest that Oklahoma is a tremendously rural state, with 68 of its 77 counties meeting the qualifications of being a rural area (based on population size) (Cromartie and Bucholtz, 2016). The five largest school districts in Oklahoma (which are all urban) only make up 22% of the student population, which would lead to the conclusion that there are more rural districts and thusly, more rural teachers (Fast Facts, 2016). Based on this information, I would, again, argue that my results are close enough to the national average to consider my dataset representative of all teachers in Oklahoma.

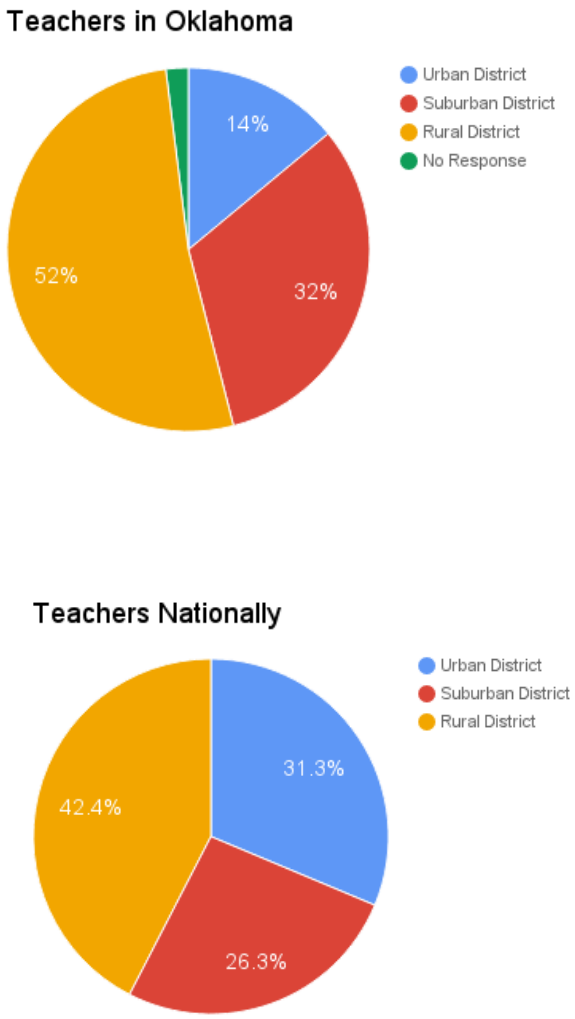


Figure 2: Charts comparing the districts in which teachers in Oklahoma teach to those districts nationally.

After the two demographic questions, the survey respondents were asked to gauge the level of disrespect they felt. 36 percent of teachers said they felt somewhat respected, 24 percent said they felt somewhat disrespected, 21 percent said they felt neutral about this topic, 10 percent said they felt very disrespected, 8

percent said they felt very respected, and 1% would not or could not answer. Two people chose to skip this specific question.

Respondents were then asked to rank several groups on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least respectful group and 5 being the most respectful group. Lawmakers were overwhelmingly given a rating of 1 by 83 percent of respondents; the other groups were fairly close in rank, but were in the following order (from most disrespectful to least): general public, parents, students, and administrators.

Generally, the results seem to indicate that most teachers feel either slightly respected or slightly disrespected within their profession, but nearly all teachers feel as if they are most disrespected by the Oklahoma state legislators. Both the responses and the case study interviews give some indication as to why teachers feel this way. Briefly and to be explained in more detail later, the teachers who feel slightly respected are generally happy within their school; they, at the least, have supportive administrators and peers. Those that feel slightly disrespected, generally are not quite as happy in their schools, mostly complaining about weak leadership and unsupportive parents. Most teachers are unhappy with the legislature because of recent budget cuts and low teacher pay.

Chapter 1

The Women Move In: The Feminization of Teaching

"Glorified babysitting" is a term that is thrown about by teachers when they discuss how they believe most parents of their students perceive them. Unbeknownst to many modern teachers, that is exactly—although, perhaps not in such negatively connoted terms—what the first female "teachers" were.

Before the 19th Century in America, teaching was considered a predominantly masculine profession, in which "masters" primarily taught Latin, English, reading, writing, and ciphering to young boys. What is interesting during this period is the large amount of "homeschooling" that took place in the Colonial New England area. As Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo (2001) explain, "public" education in colonial America comes to fruition simply because it was more expensive not to have a "town teacher." The Colonies, particularly Massachusetts, created legislation that would require all towns "of fifty families provide for instruction in reading and writing and that towns of one hundred families provide also for Latin grammar school" (p. 13). This is a key piece of educational history for the woman teacher.

The educational laws within the colonies created quite strict curriculum for boys, who typically attended school between age six and age twelve. As Perlmann and Margo (2001) go on to explain, schoolmasters—typically a young man studying to practice law or enter the ministry—would expect, even require, their pupils to have knowledge of basic skills, especially reading, before entering

into school (p. 15). For men at this time, teaching was a stepping stone into a more profitable, more highly regarded career. They saw themselves fit only to educate the older boys; it was not a man's job to care for young children. Enter the dame school, which is often described as sort of a daycare and sort of a kindergarten; the purpose of these unofficial "home" schools was to care for students too young to be of assistance to their parents and to educate younger boys in rudimentaries (Perlmann and Margo, 2001).

As simplistic as this might seem by modern public school standards, dame schools were truly the "foot in the door" to the profession of teaching for women, becoming the first way that American women could be paid by the "public" (i.e. by the township in which they taught) for teaching (Perlmann and Margo, 2001, p. 17). As dame schools became more prevalent and more needed, "three intertwined, massive social changes gave woman her new profession and education its new importance: industrialization, immigration, and urbanization" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 31). With these incredible social changes came the need for more schools and more teachers to fill those schools.

Industrialization, which began to strike America just before the Civil War, drew families away from agriculture and into cities for factory jobs. This, mixed with continuous immigration from Europe, caused cities and towns to blossom; and as cities began to expand, so too did the need for teachers. Women began to make greater gains in teaching because, to be frank, they were cheaper to hire than the "schoolmasters," particularly in the summer when most of the older male pupils were expected to be working, in more rural areas, and in schools especially

for female pupils (Perlmann and Margo, 2001).

There are two crucial points to note about early female teachers. First, dame schools, being so closely related to childcare, were never quite able to shake the "moral education" that innately comes from the care-taking of young children. In other words, women were often the proprietors of what many term "home training," which would include such social expectations as manners, politeness, general "rights" and "wrongs," all sprinkled with a dash of religious morality (Perlmann and Margo, 2001). Secondly--and very much in opposition to the first point--women were confined to the domestic sphere, relying upon their husbands or fathers as their sole source of familial income until this point in history. So, stepping outside the home for work, although perfectly suited for the job, was drastically different from the gender expectations of women (Hoffman, 2003, p. 30). From this dichotomy of expectations, grows the myth of the "angel of the schoolhouse."

Virginia Woolf's (2015) feminist assertions about the "angel of the house" are indeed very similar to the out-of-reach expectations of female teachers during this time. Young female teachers battled scrutiny from those who believed that women were not to be working outside of the home. Because of this resistance, teachers protested that it was a woman's true calling to educate children in all facets of society. Mary Swift wrote in her teaching journal (which would later be published), "Females are peculiarly adapted to teaching; they possess more patience and perseverance, than the other sex and if the moral cultivation of the

school be attended to, they will find little difficulty in governing" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 87).

The image of the idyllic "natural born teacher" became commonly accepted to the point that a double-bind developed for these women: they were, on one hand, accepted as teachers because they were women, yet they were held to such unattainable standards that they were brutally criticized when they failed to measure up. Many in the public saw teaching as an extension of mothering, and thusly they expected women, who were new to teaching and were uneducated in the best practices of this profession, to be able to step into a classroom and produce students who were "socialized" and highly educated (Hoffman, 2003). Many of these early teachers, including Lucia B. Downing and Ellen P. Lee, recounted how very young they were when they began teaching; each woman was only a teenager (fourteen or fifteen) when she began teaching and sometimes were in charge of teaching students older than themselves (Hoffman, 2003). Other teachers described the terrible conditions in which they were supposed to house school. Mary S. Adams describes, "Our school house to be sure, might be a better one, for when it rains the water comes in quite freely, but then the floor furnishes numerous facilities for it to run out again soon" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 84) In spite of dealing with these hardships, however, women were still expected to be profound teachers of children.

However, this is an unattainable goal. Nancy Hoffman, who compiled the experiences of early teachers into her work entitled *Woman's "True" Profession,* explains that "when the woman teacher failed to meet this idealized view, she

became the school marm, the spinster, the shrewish disciplinarian, and asexual failure, and the butt of humor" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 18). Women who were exalted as childrearing experts were routinely disrespected. Students, particularly older male students, were difficult to control as Ellen P. Lee explains, causing teachers to either become the "weak woman teacher" or the mean, hateful school marm (Hoffman, 2003, p. 18). Either option led to ridicule.

The "angel in the schoolhouse" was met with an additional problem, one that is familiar to modern teachers. They began to struggle to answer the question: who is responsible for the behavior of the children? Jane Roland Martin (1995) explains that industrialization was detrimental to the moral education of children. As men and women began "crossing the bridge," or leaving the domestic sphere for work, the weight of childrearing was placed on the shoulders of young female teachers, who mostly did not have their own children and had not raised children. For these women, earning the responsibility of teaching brought so many additional duties simply because of their sex. Not only were they to teach the subjects required, but they were supposed to be able to take on the domestic duties associated with children, to be a surrogate mother in a way (Martin, 1995).

Modern teachers suffer from similar expectations, which is often the root of the, frankly, disturbing struggle between educators and the parents of their students. It is an odd power struggle over who is responsible for socializing students with one side saying, "Students should be learning how to behave at home," and the other side countering that "students never learn anything

important at school." Teachers come away from the battle feeling like they are considered "glorified babysitters" instead of highly-educated professionals.

The Effects of Parents in Education

About parents, one online survey-taker said, "Parents want a good education for their children but at their convenience. They don't want homework or outside reading because it interferes with activities. They fight every battle for their child and do not want the child to be held accountable for grades or behavior. They expect education to fit into their schedule and resent when it doesn't. Parents are suspicious that teachers don't 'like' their child or has a 'personality conflict' [with the child]." Several other comments similar to this spoke to the frustration of teachers about the seemingly intentional divide between education and the domestic sphere, suggesting that parents push all educational responsibilities--curriculum, moral, social, or other--onto teachers.

Another survey-taker stated, "It is frustrating to hear people comment about how easy our job is. Teaching 30 [plus] students every hour can be like herding cats. Mostly because parents don't make their kids behave at home and don't support us when we discipline at school. My parents believed if you misbehaved at school you got in trouble at home regardless of what happened because you could usually always make more respectful choices. I wish all parents were like that. Luckily in the district I live in, most of them are like that. There are a few who feel entitled, but in rural America, respect goes a long way." This teacher seems to be expressing a feeling of disrespect that comes from the

lack of support from the parents. Many teachers have expressed that they do not believe that parents provide any form of moral education, which causes behavioral problems within the classroom.

Many modern teachers, however, do reach the moral dilemma of whether or not it is their place to determine how to educate children in how to "behave properly." Ms. Robinson, one of my teacher interviewees, was firmly one-sided. She expressed her belief that parents were to blame for the behaviors of their children, and it is one of the highest forms of disrespect when a parent will not accept responsibility for their child. When asked when she feels most valued as an educator, she said, "I probably feel the most valued when I have worked my buns off with a child, and I contact the parents to say that this child is doing nothing, and instead of slamming me for not doing the work for that child, supporting me and taking responsibility for the lack of effort from the student. That's probably when I feel the most valued, when a parent does not blame me for anything that's going wrong and will accept some responsibility on the side of that child."

She is afraid, she mentioned, that parents have lost all authority over their children, and that causes huge problems in how much a student is willing to respect any authority figure, including teachers: "I think one of the problems we have there is that the students have a lack of respect for their parents and that goes right into a lack of respect for anybody in authority." To solidify her point, she relayed a story about a teacher friend of hers, who was surprised about the amount of respect she seemed to be given after she began teaching at a new school: "I think one of my biggest eye-openings was talking to [another teacher] at a

wedding, and seeing the complete difference. She works at [a school] where their Free and Reduced Lunch is extremely low. I want to say that she said they'd just gotten an email saying that it's gone up to 12 percent or some kind of number like that. But we kind of wondered about…we kind of worried for her when she left [our school] and went to [another school]. We thought, 'You're going to get up there with all the doctors and the lawyers and their kids, and they're going to tell you what to do and how to do it.' And she said, 'It is not that at all.' She said that in the bigger school, she is extremely supported by all of her parents. She's never had a time when a parent hasn't been supportive. She said that it's a completely different world."

When asked what she thinks causes the divide between parents and teachers, she suggested maybe a lack of education, especially in the rural area where she teaches: "You know…and I don't want to sound bad when I say this, but I think a lot of it, Kody, is a lack of education in themselves. Because—this is just me, myself, and I—I feel like the parents that I deal with, parents that are more educated: you get more support from, you get more respect from. People who are not educated, they're doing good if they have a high school degree: you get less respect from them. I'm thinking that it may have something to do with their education. I really don't know that, but from my point of view, that's why. Most of the time anyway."

If parents are the answer to teachers feeling respected, what can we do to help parents teach moral education at home? Ms. Robinson suggested teaching parenting skills: "I've talked to several people about this because it's made me

think about it more because you brought it up with me…but I've heard so many people comment that parents don't know how to parent these days. How do we combat that? And, Kody, I really don't know how to combat that, but that's one thing we could do would be to teach a parent how to parent. I think that would get more respect in the classroom. That's just me."

Until we can teach "parents how to parent," as she suggests, how can we help to teach students how to behave? "Some things that I do in my classroom…One of the things we do here definitely is the Six Pillars of Character. Trying to instill character in kids. And like I said, I think it comes back to that our parents don't know how to parent, so you have to be able to parent for them, with them, I should say too. But even just little things, like when you see a child being so disrespectful to their peers, just letting them know that is not respectful. To try to teach kids 'Yes, ma'am' and 'No, ma'am.' I really don't think kids even realize sometimes how they affect others. Just take the time to talk to them."

In her old-school kind of way, it seems likely that Ms. Robinson is onto something. While it is hard to justify the statement "parents just don't know how to parent," it is possible that this often harsh, distinct dividing line between parent and teacher stems from the historic removal of parents from the household. The structure of families has changed dramatically since the beginnings of the public school. According to a report completed in 2015 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 34.4 million families in the US contained one or more child under the age of 18; that's 34.4 million families with a child engaged in some sort of schooling. Among those families, mothers had or were looking for work outside

of the home at nearly 70 percent and fathers had or were looking for work outside of the home at nearly 93 percent (BLS, 2015). In other words, a great number of those millions of families had both parents who were working outside of the home.

Jane Roland Martin, in *The Schoolhome* (1995), writes of the effect on children both parents going to work outside of the home can have. She discusses the uptick in the number of "latchkey" kids and how children are now forced to give up their youth to take on greater and greater household and family responsibilities in the absence of their parents. She emphasizes the importance of education within the home: "It is a fact too seldom remembered that school and home are partners in the education of a nation's young...home's continuing contributions to a child's development are both relied on by the school and society and refused public recognition. This time-honored arrangement does not give credit where it is due, yet in periods of stability it has worked. Not perfectly, perhaps, but well enough because the hidden partner know its role and is willing and able to carry it out" (Martin, 2015, n.p.). However, it has become clear that, in the eyes of many teachers, the silent partner of school is no longer able to carry its weight. With so many parents being out of the home, students are missing out on that vital element which makes school continue to function as it always has: moral education.

In quite the opposite camp, one educational theorist, Redding S. Sugg (1978), places the burden of the moral education of the child squarely on the shoulders of the teacher. He suggests that as teaching became feminized, the role

of the teacher became more akin to that of a "mother," due to woman's natural mothering ability. Coining the term "Motherteacher," Sugg suggests that the role of the teacher is not to instruct the child, but to nurture the personhood and individuality of the child: "Taking us at whatever sacrosanct stage of growth she finds us, Mother teacher professes to teach us nothing about the world beyond ourselves we do not profess ourselves ready to learn. She compassionately connives at keeping each student in his own genial environment, a womb of subjectivity...In order to provide this ultimate kindness, Motherteacher subverts the curriculum and discredits the idea that there should be one or even several curricula designed for different talents and capacities. For to maintain the integrity of any curriculum whatever is to impose requirement on the child or the infantilized youth, and requirements are antilife!" (Sugg, 1978, p. 230-1). In other words, Sugg believes that the role of the teacher has become one of ultimate nurturing at the cost of traditional education.

While neither parents nor teachers can be held fully responsible for the moral education of children, each is partially responsible. Both the concept of the Schoolhome and of the Motherteacher suggest that teachers do hold some stake in helping to build the moral character of their students. Yet, with so many students and so many extra duties, this is difficult for the teacher (to say the least). Leading to a cycle of blame and disrespect which has developed between teachers and parents, who each accuse the other of not teaching students what is really important. And this leaves students caught in the middle.

Chapter 2

Westward Bound: Answering the Call

For many teachers, both historically and now, becoming a teacher was not necessarily a decision; it was a calling. During one survey of teachers, Sonia Nieto (2005) discovered that, "When asked, many say that they become teachers for reasons that sound old-fashioned and that seem at odds with the current national obsession with bureaucracy, accountability, and high-stakes testing: In general, they view teaching as a "calling" and they are driven by a sense of service." Nieto (2005) goes on to describe the results of the survey, which found that 96 percent of the nearly 1,000 teachers surveyed said that they loved teaching and 72 percent said that contributing to society and helping others was the most important part of their job (p.3). This idea of teaching as a "calling" rather than a job really seemed to take off as women began pushing into the profession. Surrounding the female teacher, as was mentioned before, was this myth that women were more suited for teaching because of their sex; women utilized this myth, transforming it into "the calling," as a justification to seek out work outside of the domestic sphere (Kaufman, 1984). "The calling" became an even more prominent idea in the writings of those teachers who traveled from the New England states into the western states--the largely unsettled, wild frontier--to take positions teaching in newly formed towns (Kaufman, 1984).

Female teachers began traveling westward in search of teaching positions as early as the 1820s (Kaufman, 1984, p. 5). Several different organizations, many associated with a religious institution, sent groups of young women into Ohio and Indiana, with few brave young teachers making it as far west as Oregon and California (Kaufman, 1984, p. 6). Polly Welts Kaufman (1984), author of *Women Teachers on the Frontier*, explains how the number of women heading west to teach began increasing between the 1820s and just before the start of the American Civil War in the 1860s. Early teachers were supported by seminary schools, like Zilpah Grant's Female Seminary (Ipswich, Massachusetts) and Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary (New York). With their main goal being to spread Protestantism and moral education, these organizations loaned money to young women who wished to train at their facilities specifically for positions in the West (p. 6-7). Prior to 1852, a steady, yet small stream of teachers were being placed in towns in western states. In 1852, however, the Ladies' Society for the Promotion of Education at the West merged with the National Board, increasing the amount of sponsorships available to young women, and subsequently, increasing the number of teachers being sent into western states. Although women sent by the National Board had only pledged to teach for two years, an estimated two-thirds of known teachers remained in western states permanently (Kaufman, 1984, p. 6).

What caused these young women, who usually ranged in age from late teens to mid-twenties, is a truly fascinating mixture of factors all wrapped around one glaring need: "As teachers the women felt a strong pull to bring education and

Protestant evangelical religion to the West, and some possessed a sense of adventure as well; as women they were pushed by a strong sense of person economic need" (Kaufman, 1984, p. 13). It seems that, while many women used the "call" of a religious mission or the romantic view of adventure or the personal drive to improve the lives of children as a kind of excuse to take a position in the West, all of the women who wrote about their intentions to move west report that money was truly the biggest factor in their decision. One women, Augusta Moore, who left Bangor, Maine to teach in La Salle County, Illinois, wrote, "'I am in debt, and I wish to go where I can earn money...Life has lost its fanciful, and put its real look to me'" (Kaufman, 1984, p. 14).

Many of the teachers who went west were self-reliant; nearly two-thirds were supporting themselves financially. For some of these women, this was due to the death of one or both parents. Some were "older professional teachers, long on their own." For other young women, the prospect of support outside of their family, marriage, was either a detestable option or not an option at all (Kaufman, 1984, According to the 1850 Census report (as recounted by Kaufman), there were more women than men in the twenty- to thirty-year range (when most young people would marry) in the New England states. This number would increase slightly each year until the Civil War, which would cause there to be a dramatic excess of women over men (Kaufman, 1984. P. 15).

To summarize, most women teachers who were placed in the West were young, were unmarried, were orphans or only had one living parent, and were completely self-supporting. These factors, coupled with the surplus of teachers in

the New England states, caused these women to want to look for better teaching prospects in the budding towns of the frontier.

Of course, being a single female in a rather wild and still fairly unsettled region of a very large country posed problems. The biggest and most obvious being that they had no real support system. They were, as Kaufman describes, anomalies in their communities, being women without families or children. They sometimes struggled to find appropriate lodging and had to negotiate their salaries (Kaufman, 1984, p. 34-8). They had taken a "man's role" by having a job outside of the domestic sphere, and so they were sort of set apart from the women in the community, leaving them very much alone. Because of this--and other problems that come from being essentially the only single woman of age within a community--many western teacher chose to marry, often becoming second wives (Kaufman, 1984, p. 38-45). However, there was such a deeply-instilled sense of self-sustainability and independence that many of the teachers who married continued to teach (Kaufman, 1984, p. 45-8). This independence would later be the springboard for teaching to become a full-fledged profession.

The "call" of financial security which once lead women into teaching, ironically, has now become the main reason the teachers, especially in Oklahoma, leave the teaching profession. Teaching as a career in Oklahoma is no longer a stable way for a single female teacher to support herself.

It is fair to say that anyone who holds a teaching degree, earned the right to teach. In fact, this is how many teachers in Oklahoma feel. One teacher stated, "We [teachers] all have attended at least four years of college, graduated, passed

numerous exams, attend hours of professional development, and spend endless hours trying to find new ways to assist all our students. What other profession can say these things?" However, Oklahoma is one of many states that are reeling from a "teacher shortage." The amount of people who were alternatively certified (i.e. were given a teaching license without holding a degree in education) has doubled since last school year. According to the State Department of Oklahoma, 1,060 people were alternatively certified and employed this school year (SDE, 2016). From the casual outside observer, it probably appears as if the state is in an educational crisis, and certainly calling over a thousand alternatively certified teachers "emergency certified" seems scary. It seems as if Oklahoma does not have enough people entering the field of teaching.

Oklahoma's biggest, most crushing problem with public education is that teachers do not stay in Oklahoma to teach. The attrition rate is highest among new teachers at 17 percent, but falls only slightly to 10 percent among teacher who have taught for 10 years (Hendrix, n.d.). This percentage does not account for the recent university graduates who either do not enter the teaching profession or who leave the state before they begin teaching. There are no datasets concerning how many new graduates leave the state before beginning to teach; however, based solely upon self-reporting in the online survey, it seems like this is a common occurrence. One survey-taker reported: "As soon as my husband retires from the Air Force in June, we are moving back to Texas, primarily because of the lack of respect I feel as a teacher in Oklahoma. I will receive a minimum of a $1000 per month raise." Another survey-taker says, about her experience moving out of

Oklahoma, “I just recently moved to Texas. I don't know if people are experiencing the same things everywhere in the state, but I do feel more respected here. I chose to work in Greenwood ISD, where for your research purposes, I am starting at $42,500 with 0 years of experience in a brand new building. In Midland ISD, where I live and where I was offered another job, the starting salary is $49,050 with 0 years of experience (and I know several people who actually started at $52,000) because several oil companies in the town got together and donated $6.5 million dollars to Midland ISD to pay teachers more. I feel like that's strong support from the community and respect. Both of those salaries are higher than the top step in Oklahoma. I moved here because my husband got a job, but it just makes me sad to see everyone leaving Oklahoma because that's where I grew up.”

The lure of moving out of Oklahoma seems generally appealing. Many of the respondents to the online survey expressed the desire to teach in a different state or expressed the resignation that they must keep teaching in Oklahoma because of certain restrictions, like family or financial ability. One teacher stated that he/she “cannot wait to leave this state [Oklahoma]” because of the lack of respect for teachers. Another said, “Overall in Oklahoma I feel so beat up that I would leave in a heartbeat if it wouldn't be bad for my family right now.”

The reasons for teacher attrition do not seem to have changed much since the 1950s. According to a study completed by Russell L Walker (1958), appropriately entitled *Factors within the School Systems of Oklahoma which Cause Teacher to Leave the Profession*, the biggest reason for Oklahoma teachers

to leave the field of teaching was moving to another state. Walker analyzed the data collected by the Teachers' Retirement System within the years of 1954 and 1955. About the "reasons given for withdrawal [from the retirement system]," Walker found that, of the 687 teachers that left the profession in that school year, "Nearly half (three hundred) indicated they were leaving the State, while 192 indicated change of work. Undoubtedly, many of those who left the State did so with the intention of teaching elsewhere" (p. 64). In another part of his study, Walker mailed out a questionnaire to 200 randomly chosen former Oklahoma teachers. Of the respondents--of which, there were 131--there were many still teaching: "More than one-third, 35.1 percent, of the respondents indicated that they were still teaching, but in some other state or country" (p. 120). Walker also found, from his questionnaire, "Salary considerations was the most disliked factor in teaching" and that "Salary considerations, more security in another type of work, better teaching conditions in another state, and better working conditions in another state were the reasons given by most respondents for their leaving the teaching profession in Oklahoma" (p. 121).

It is obvious that teachers are still leaving the state, and, oddly enough, it seems the factors are incredibly similar to those found by Walker in his 1958 study. According to the data collected in this study, it seems as if most teachers believe that they do not get paid enough to deal with the considerable amount of stress, responsibility, and disrespect that accompanies the job. About this, one survey-taker said, "Teachers have a college or master's degree, and when you see

Oklahoma schools fiftieth in the nation on teachers' salaries, this indicates that a teacher is not valued as they should be."

Because of this, many veteran teachers are "hearing the call" to leave the teaching profession. All of the interviewees made some sort of statement about how they have considered other job possibilities. Ms. Dee reflected on whether or not she would like to continue teaching and stated that, while she wanted to remain in the field of education, she probably did not want to continue teaching: "I went to school and got my degree in English and got certified to teach. I went straight into teaching and I've stuck with it. I've certainly thought about what other skills do I have and what else could I do if I decided that I wanted to do something else, but I really like teaching, I really like being in education. I think that probably the path that I want to go on is to keep teaching in the classroom for a number of years, and then move on to something else within education, whether they be to become some type of curriculum specialist or something like that. But no, I haven't [had another career]. This has been my only career. My only serious career." Ms. Allison reported during the interview, that she had spent time teaching in another state only to return to Oklahoma. It was interesting, in light of so many teachers saying that they want to leave Oklahoma, that Ms. Allison returned; so I asked her about why she continued to teach in this state. She responded, "My family was here. I was a military kid, so it's the only place that's ever felt like home. I almost don't know what to do besides teaching. It's what I've been doing for 22 years. It's not like there's a big call for interpreting poetry anywhere else. It's just what I do. I've invested so much time in it now that it's

almost too late to quit...There are some days when I think, 'Surely there is something else I can do.' But I get a lot of encouragement from my family and from students. Some days, it's harder to go than others." Unlike the other interviewed teachers, Ms. Robinson did report that she had considered another career, accounting. When I asked why she never pursued it, she responded, "I never did mainly because I love being with kids and I liked helping kids. I never did. Nope. I never did pursue that avenue...To be honest with you, Kody, what's kept me teaching in small-town Oklahoma is that I don't want to have to drive to another city to work or find a job. And I could have done that and found a job that pays a whole lot more than what I get paid now. But for me, that's what's kept me is the small-town atmosphere here. And not wanting to have to drive."

One truly disheartening aspect, I learned, that kept the interviewees in Oklahoma was this sort of resignation to the job they all shared. This idea that there is nothing else they are trained to do or nothing else they would even want to do at this point in their careers. There seemed to be no detectable "rose-colored glasses" obscuring the views of these teachers. They were teaching because they had been doing it for a while and because they felt their students needed them, not because it is a rewarding career.

Each of the interviewees also made some type of statement suggesting that it was or has been difficult for them to recommend teaching as a career option to those who have asked. Ms. Allison put it simply and beautifully: "I want to almost discourage them; 'Don't do that. It'll hurt you too much.' I don't want that, but I also don't want to discourage them because we've got to have somebody." For

Ms. Robinson, and many like her, teaching runs in the family. She recounted the very frank conversation she was forced to have when her grandson told her he wanted to become an English teacher: “But when he first said he was going to, I told him, ‘[grandson], you can’t go into education if you don’t have the desire to help those kids, because,’ I said, ‘number one: you’re not going to get the money you deserve. Number two: you’re not going to get the respect you deserve. If you decide to go into education, you definitely need to leave the state of Oklahoma.’ That’s just how I put it. ‘Because,’ I said, ‘The state of Oklahoma is rock-bottom as far as teachers are concerned. Not only in pay, but in respect as well.’ And I would almost like to know, Kody, if other states have the same problems as well…. When I first found out that’s where he was headed, it was hard for me to encourage him to go into that field. It was. Because I think when you put forth your life—five years—to go to college…Let’s say an attorney did that, a state’s attorney; an attorney gets out and they get respected. They aren’t looked down upon like they’re a know-nothing. Teachers don’t get that respect. As time passed, I would just listen to [my grandson]. I honestly did not have supporting words to help him.” Ms. Dee, the youngest and newest of the interviewees, had some thoughts about teaching which I found especially discouraging. Essentially, she stated that she felt so devalued as a teacher that she felt like it was not a respectable thing for her to be doing, like it was no longer the “most noble profession,” like to be a teacher was essentially synonymous to being the unpaid intern in a large corporation: “I’ve had some students last year, when we talked about careers, who were interested in being teachers. They asked me, ‘Do you like

being a teacher?' And I was able to say, 'Here are some of the good points and some of the bad points.' Even though I am a teacher and I respect teachers and I think being in education is a really commendable thing, I personally don't view teaching as an ideal, awesome, really respectable career. Pretty much anybody who wants to be a teacher, unless you're a complete idiot, can get your degree in Education and be a teacher. Like they say, those who don't do, teach. That might be offensive to some teachers, but I'm not that offended by it. I kind of think it's true...Because I would at least like for my students or even my son or my husband, I would want more for them than being a teacher. I think that there's more out there that's cool. And I don't necessarily plan…I don't know if I'm going to be a teacher forever. I want to probably get my PhD, likely in Education, and do something above and beyond the classroom that's within Education." It is difficult to know that teaching is still considered a stepping-stone to a "more respectable" career to some teachers, even teachers who are good at their jobs.

It seems as if more and more teachers are discouraging students, offspring, or anyone else to become teachers. As one survey-taker bluntly put it, "As a veteran teacher of 30 years, a former Teacher of the Year, a department chair, a counselor, and writer for textbooks...I advise young people to stay away from a career in education."

Teachers are not unjustified in their concerns about pay. The Oklahoma State Department of Education self-reports that, on average, the highest salary that can be attained by a teacher is $44, 594 per year (which includes benefits, however meager they may be) (Fast Facts, 2016). This salary is for veteran

teachers who hold a PhD and probably hold a “lead teacher” or “department chair” title within their school. For a teacher just entering the field, the pay rate is significantly lower at $31,600 per year. For a new teacher with a Doctorate degree, the salary is only $34,000 per year. Oklahoma’s salary for teachers (at the highest) is not only much lower than the national average--which is $56,610 per year--it is significantly lower than even the regional average--which is $47,887. Oklahoma comes in dead last behind the six other states in the region. Considering this and also the fact that salaries have not increased for Oklahoma teachers in eight years, there should be little question as to why the teachers who choose to leave do so without much hesitation (Fast Facts, 2016).

There is a sort of rage among some teachers concerning the topic of pay. One teacher summed it up perfectly when he/she stated: “I work 55-60 hours a week, am grade level chair (no stipend), have an intern, and serve as a mentor teacher (again, no stipend). I serve on my district’s leadership team. I pay [for] my own professional development each summer, and I make less than $39,000 a year. After 17 years of teaching. I've paid for every book in my classroom library, every staple and sticker, and every teaching resource. I tutor students after school, for free. I moved my entire classroom myself over the summer. My expense...And yet I am told I am home by 4:00 [p.m.], have the summers off, and just have to 'keep them busy'. And I do not deserve a decent salary.”

When teaching as a career becomes an unsustainable source of income, there is a significant problem within the field of education. Anyone who has ever been inside a classroom knows the value of a qualified, experienced, educated

teacher. With many of its best teachers fleeing the state for better financial prospects, Oklahoma is forced to short-term remedies like emergency and alternative certification. This does not fix the true problem nor does it keep qualified teachers in Oklahoma. In fact, it sends public education into an inescapable spiral of educational problems, which are manifested in other ways that teachers might feel disrespected--like limits on creativity and a heavy focus on standardized testing.

Although the state of education in Oklahoma looks rather dire, many teachers do not answer the call to leave. As Nieto (2005) in her survey explains about teachers, "In most cases, they became teachers out of a sense of mission, for love more than money. Their responses, taken together, define an idealistic group of people who share at least one significant quality: They have a passion for teaching, a quality that, according to the report, is 'palpable, vastly unappreciated and a valuable asset that money can't buy'" (p. 3). The sense of duty and passion described is apparent in each of the teachers interviewed for this survey. Ms. Allison is one teacher who, despite all the reasons to exit the profession, has found a way to continue teaching. She powerfully explained, "It's about the kids. It's always the kids. I know that what I do every day does matter. Even though my paycheck says it doesn't and the TV says it doesn't, it really does. When you look at a kid who needs you, that matters. And that's why I need to keep my focus, and not let the rest of this suck all of the joy out of it. It's a really fun job once the classroom door is closed." Ms. Dee says that she keeps striving to be a better educator because "being in a school where the students really need good teachers

and there isn’t a high retention rate, you feel responsibility to want to keep going because if you quit you’re a part of the same problem and the same cycle. So realizing that and seeing the effect it has, the immense effect that it has, when a teacher quits and leaves students in the middle of the year or whatever the situation may be. That makes you want to keep going.”

Above all, I have learned that teaching is a kind of altruistic trap. Teachers “answer the call” of needy children--out of some innate teacher-drive found in all who enter the profession--only to become trapped. The desire to escape the negative aspects--low pay, few benefits, lack of respect, increasing restrictions, multiplying numbers of students in a single class--is overpowered, for most, by the fact that children need to be educated and cared for. In the same way that teachers on the frontier were trapped in teaching after the altruistic drive to save the souls of youngsters, modern teachers are trapped by the idea that all children deserve to be educated; no amount of loneliness, no level of disrespect, no lack of adequate salary will drive teachers from the field. Instead, teachers will leave Oklahoma, because, as many teachers expressed, it is the state that is bad, not the job. As one teacher put it, “We don't teach to gain respect from our communities, students, parents, and lawmakers. We know there will be disagreement among all parties, and we know we will not be able to make everyone happy...As for the others out there, I don't really care if you respect me or not, because I teach to make a difference in children's lives and to better myself during that journey. So, choose to respect me, or choose to disrespect me. Either way, I'm going to keep rocking my ‘easy’ and fabulous job as a teacher.”

Chapter 3

Moving South: Teaching the "Other"

A bloody battle, to say the least, the American Civil War saw more than 600,000 casualties, leaving an unprecedented number of young women widowed (History, 2009). Because of this, teaching became a steady and viable way for women to support themselves and their children. Teaching was rapidly becoming a widely accepted women's career as the domestic sphere—as it was once known—was all but disappearing.

In many ways, the motivating factors for northern teachers to move to southern states are similar to those that, decades before, motivated eastern teachers to move west: money, adventure, altruism, and an overflowing supply of women willing to be teachers.

As the Civil War stretches towards the end, the female abolitionists of the North make significant strides toward educating ex-slaves by establishing "freedmen's schools" in nearly every large city in the South that the Union army had taken, and "by 1870, five years after the end of the Civil War, some five thousand teachers were instructing about 150,000 students, a modest proportion of the former slave population" (Hoffman, 2003, 120-1). Women, especially young white women, began virtually flocking to the South.

As Hoffman explains, there are many reasons female teachers felt the desire to leave their homes and move into the war torn post-Confederate states despite the scrutiny they experienced from both their own families and from white

southerners. Many women felt the call of altruism, believing that educating African Americans was their duty as abolitionists, as Christians, and/or as women. They were "unified by the notion that education was a tool of liberation, a route to agency and choice" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 121). Other women saw it as an opportunity to escape the typical expectations of women; in the South, they did not have to seek out a man to marry, they did not have to give up their profession, they could transgress societal taboos by forming close bonds with African Americans (particularly African American men), and they could live in long-term arrangements with other women (either in companionship or in a relationship) (Hoffman, 2003). Other women simply saw it as a way to have more freedom over their curricula. Finally, for many women there was the glamor of martyrdom; they "fought the good fight" from the inside while using "the lofty language of self-sacrifice, divine calling, and service to the oppressed and to God in justifying their decisions to teach" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 123).

While in the South, these teachers experienced a certain level of ostracization from white southerners, who clung tightly to Confederate ideals. There were many ways in which white teachers felt as if they were separated from other Caucasians. They were, first, geographically separated. One of the biggest tolls taken on the south by the Civil War was the immediate segregation of former slaves and white Southerners. Many plantation owners abandoned their property, moving into cities and larger communities looking for better prospects after the end of the war. This left small pockets of former slaves living on plantations lands. Because the Northern teachers were seeking to educate African Americans,

of course they would seek out these small communities. Two young teachers from the North, Mary Ames and Emily Bliss, describe such a situation: “The only whites for miles around, they were taken in by Sarah, a former slave who lived at the back of the ‘big house’ with her husband and six children” (Hoffman, 2003, p. 124). Being separated from other whites allowed for these teachers to become, as much as they could be, integrated into these make-shift African American communities. They lived among former slaves, engaged in respectful relationships--some which could be considered friendships--with former slaves, and even dined with former slaves (which, as Hoffman describes, was a prominent social taboo in the South). One pair of teachers, Laura Towne and Ellen Murray, took this idea of integration one step further by building a family; these two women adopted an African American child named Puss. “Laura [Towne] wrote the ‘grand news’ home, describing Puss as ‘bright as a dollar. She has been my scholar for years’” (Hoffman, 2003, p. 129).

Towne’s description of her adopted daughter as intelligent reveals another way in which many Northern teachers were set apart from most white Southerners; these teachers believed in the potential intellectual equality of the former slaves. As Hoffman explains, many teachers at the time wrote about teaching African Americans with a rhetoric “framed in terms of a transition to full personhood” (Hoffman, 2003, p. 127). In opposition to the belief of many, these teachers suggested that, with the proper education and with adequate time devoted to that education, African Americans could transition from “barbarism to civilization” and that they could “arrive at what they considered intellectual and

moral equality with whites" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 127). Of course, this belief is in direct opposition to the pro-slavery propaganda which asserted that African Americans were intellectually inferior. The teachers who were in charge of the education of former slaves began to see what they described as an unexpected brightness and desire for learning, and thus, they began to push the idea of their possible intellectual equality. These teachers were ideologically ostracized from most other Caucasians in the South.

One more way, and perhaps the most damning way, that the white teachers from the North became ostracized from the white Southerners was through their actual curriculum. Many teachers began to push for a larger social movement among their African American students through a social-minded curriculum. "There is also surprisingly strong evidence that secular and evangelical teachers designed their lessons so that the lines between teaching about civics and teaching for political activism were blurred" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 132). Many teachers even utilized African American literature, like works from Frederick Douglass and Phillis Wheatley, to help promote a sense of activism and general cultural and racial awareness among their students. This, as could be predicted, was virtually abhorred by many white Southerners: "Indeed, many Southerners were angered at what they called the political indoctrination carried out by freedpersons' teachers, especially with regard to that forbidden subject--social equality of African Americans and whites" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 133). Many women teachers report heated exchanges between themselves and white Southerners concerning social change.

However, being all but pushed from the "white community" did not seem to compromise the sense of mission of the Northern teachers: "In truth, the teachers were neither angels nor saintly souls, but women pushing against the boundaries of the possible in regard to race and class arrangements, in physical, intellectual and spiritual endurance, but taking on the sheer hard work of teaching" (Hoffman, 2003, p.139) These women had a purpose: they were the teachers of the "other." In the context of the post-Civil War southern states, it is clear to see that the "other" refers to freed African American slaves. Largely, the stigma of teaching non-white students has gone away. In fact, white teachers are now commended for being able to successfully teach in inner-city schools, which are mostly populated by non-white students. What can be seen now—when teaching the racial "other" –is a sort of white-washing of culture.

To borrow a bit of educational theory from Paulo Freire, it seems as if these white teachers were white-washing any semblance of African American culture that remained with the ex-slaves. Although with the best intentions at heart (one would hope), by teaching the "proper" (proper meaning white here) way to speak, read, and write to mostly illiterate people, they actually stripped away the African Americans ability to cultivate their own literacy. Freire suggests that when the "oppressor" or dominant culture demands "literacy" from the oppressed, "people end up believing that the way they speak is savage. They become ashamed of speaking their own language, particularly in the presence of the colonialists who constantly proclaim the beauty and superiority of their own language. The colonizers' behaviors and tastes, including language, are the models

that were imposed by the colonial structure over centuries of oppression. At some point the ex-colonialized internalize these myths and feel ashamed" (Freire, 1987, p. 82). In effect, ex-slaves were not allowed the freedom of establishing their own culture; instead, they were shifted from an overt type of oppression into a subtle type of oppression. The subtle oppression of white-washed learning is continuously damaging to African Americans and to other non-white groups. As one scholar, Lois Weis (1988), points out, "The point I would like to stress is that the burden of acting white [assimilating to the dominant culture] seriously affects the academic efforts and outcomes of black children of all social classes or socioeconomic backgrounds...Nor is the burden of acting white limited to black adolescents in high school or to black youths in college. The problem is also found among blacks who have made it in school and are now situated in what were traditionally "white positions" in the corporate economy and mainstream institutions. For some of these adult blacks and middleclass blacks the burden of acting white has led to "dropout problems"; for some others it has even resulted in suicide." (n.p.)

It is clear that remnants of this level of subtle oppression have tendrils of effect even today. According to recent census data, Caucasians make up only 77.1 percent of people living in the United States. African Americans make up 13.3 percent, Hispanic or Latinos at 17.6 percent, Asians at 5.6, and Native Americans and Pacific Islanders making up 1.4 percent (Census, n.p.). Similar numbers are reflected in our public schools.

Additionally, racial and socioeconomic segregation continue to be on the rise, with Latinos "having the dubious distinction of being the most segregated of all ethnic groups in terms of race, ethnicity, and poverty" (Nieto, 2005, p. 6). Couple this with the fact that teachers overall have become "more monolithic, monocultural, and monolingual," with the number of white teachers increasing while the number of teachers of color decreasing to less than 11 percent (Nieto, 2005, p. 6). "Complicating the issue further," Nieto explains, "although there is a crucial need for teachers of all backgrounds to teach poor students of color in urban districts, fewer than 6% of education graduates express a desire to teach in such districts" (2005, p.7). This, as one might imagine, leaves a huge gap between the experiences of teachers and those of their students. Many students in urban schools feel forgotten by education.

One way in which this manifests, to look to the experience of Ms. Dee, is through the level of disrespect a white teacher might feel from their non-white students. Ms. Dee, as I explained previously, teaches at a large inner-city school. Her student population, on average, is 85 percent Hispanic/Latino. I asked her specifically if she felt that having only or mostly teachers who were of the dominant culture had any effect on students. She explained, "Yeah, I think that's a huge problem. I think it's always been like that in education, that it's always been primarily female teachers, probably white female teachers. Maybe we do see that more in Oklahoma than in other states. It's so important for students to see a diversity of people of different cultures, with different experiences, both male and female perspectives from their authority figures and teachers. Sure, that is a huge

concern because students aren't going to get the best education they can get with only one type of perspective...I think from the student perspective, they're going to be valuing you more maybe if they see a variety of different types of teachers with different backgrounds versus maybe seeing their teachers and authority figures as one cookie-cutter type of person. And maybe that's fair and maybe it's not fair, but that might be their perspective."

Obviously, educational segregation is not the answer and is not being advocated for. Instead, public schools should make a conscious effort to undermine the whitewashing of education in three ways: first, actively employ more non-white teachers, especially in schools where most of the population is non-white; secondly, purposefully move away from the generic "whites only" curriculum that is often found in canonical literature and history; thirdly, encourage students to celebrate, to learn about, and to explore their own culture and the cultures of other students.

While the racial "other" is the most historically prominent, there are three additional types of "other" which are discriminated against. Many teachers in the online survey complained of feelings of disrespect or ostracism for teaching students who are in need of Special Education (SPED), students who are English Language Learners (ELL), or students who are engaged in non-core extra-curricular classes.

Special Education is notoriously difficult to teach. As a primary teacher or co-teacher, your duties extend far beyond your role in the classroom. SPED teachers are equal parts child advocate, parent liaison, secretary, and teacher.

Most SPED teachers harness a calm-in-the-eye-of-the-storm quality that can be incredibly beneficial to general education teachers and all students. However, regardless of how tenured or experienced or professional they may be, many SPED teachers report feeling incredibly disrespected from a source one might not imagine: their fellow teachers. One survey-taker reports, “The regular [education] teachers don't seem to have a lot of respect for special [education] teachers. They don't ask us to consult when students are struggling like they should and don't tend to follow suggestions we make.”

In a similar type of role are those teachers who have students who are English Language Learners. They are also responsible for adapting lessons to suit the needs of students who do not yet speak English fluently. And, as the Center for Immigration Studies expresses, the number of ELL students in the U.S. is on the rise, finding in one report that an astounding 63.2 million U.S. residents (ages five and older) speak a language other than English while at home (Zeigler, 2015).

Teaching ELL students is a difficult task because Oklahoma has a fairly large Vietnamese population in addition to its ever growing Hispanic/Latino population. In many schools, ELL teachers are tasked with classes of students who speak various languages, not only Spanish. Because of this, unless the ELL teachers can speak all of the languages represented, ELL students and teachers alike are heavily reliant upon technology to aid them in communicating and learning. One ELL teacher reported: “I don't feel they [fellow teachers] care to know all the work that goes into an ELL position and I'm treated like a regular

teacher in regard to pay and the job of ELL [surpasses] what I did as a regular teacher. I feel used." This difficult job is only made more difficult by the lack of resources made available, like access to technology. This is especially problematic, according to one teacher, in rural areas: "Poor technology in rural schools. Each child should have an iPad or laptop to use at school."

This type of ostracization and refusal to acknowledge the expertise of SPED and ELL teachers can be very dangerous for the education of the students. When teachers, whose specific training and job aligns with the needs of nontraditional students, are ignored, those students then miss out on anything additional that could make their educational experience more rich and worthwhile.

The last, and most different, form of "other" really deals less with students as the "other," but it is still valuable to consider. Extracurricular subjects, while enjoyable, are not considered necessary by many administrators and are the first to take a hit during budget cuts. With the pressure of high-stakes standardized testing, many teachers of the core subjects do seem to take extracurricular classes, and subsequently the teachers of those classes, for granted. Ms. Robinson, one of the teachers interviewed for this study, recounts in her journal an example of the type of disrespect extracurricular teachers can feel from other teachers: "[The] music teacher comes into my room before school. She is a very good teacher--35-year career. She had trouble with a 4th grade student. When she talked to his homeroom teacher, his teacher said that since the student and the music teacher didn't get along, they would just send the child to P.E. [physical education] every

day, and he would not go to music. The regular teacher was quite young, and the music teacher felt that this 'young teacher' did not respect her enough to back her up in front of a student." It seems that for this music teacher, the fact that her class and teaching was devalued and seen as interchangeable with other extracurricular classes was incredibly disrespectful.

Indeed, it is disrespectful to discount the value that extracurricular classes can add to students' education. Especially with standardized testing being so prevalent, it is beneficial for students to be placed in a classroom in which there is no pressure to "do well" and it is accepted to learn through play. The defunding of extracurricular activities, especially sports, is beginning to take a toll on Oklahoma students. This has had such an effect that students in the Oklahoma City district, including students at the school in which Ms. Dee works, staged a walk-out to protest the budget cuts initiated by the state legislature. I asked Ms. Dee to tell me about the experience of her students: "I think there was a particular senior or a particular group of upperclassmen who kind of had this idea, organized it and put it together. The other students followed very quickly with this idea of walking out...They had a walk-out because they understood that because of the budget cuts a lot of things were being cut as far as the athletic department and things. So the students got together and decided that they were going to walk out, and actually I viewed it as a positive thing. I thought it was really cool that the students were able to come together and wanted to stand up and have a voice. I don't know if necessarily all of the students that walked out that day got that or

committed fully. But I viewed it as a positive thing, and I think that shows that we're teaching students to be self-advocates. That's a great thing."

And herein lies the solution. It is true that teachers of the "other" are undervalued because other teachers and administrators cannot fully grasp how vital and important these teachers are to the students. To increase the respect given to these teachers, students need to be taught how to and be given a platform to speak out, to vocalize what they want and need, to make clear how important and life-changing SPED, ELL, and extracurricular activities are to their educational experience. Perhaps this could be taught as part of a civics or social studies curriculum. Just like the early female teachers in the South, the modern teachers of the "other" are taking on those students and subjects that are pushed to the wayside. No one can know how valuable they are to those students until the students themselves make it clear.

Chapter 4

The Men Come Back: The Bureaucratization of Teaching

As the 20th century approached, European immigration into the United States was on the rise. Between 1880 and 1920, roughly 20 million immigrants entered America (History, 2003). With the growth of cities came the need for more schools. Simultaneously, it was becoming more commonly accepted for women to be teachers, especially in light of the suffrage movement beginning to take root, but the professionalization of women teachers came at a cost.

Heavy immigration began to shape education as the goal for public schools became to "Americanize" immigrant children: "School could substitute for family, church, and cultural center by teaching malleable children (and through them, their parents) American history and values" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 232). In order to replace the unacceptable European values with proper American ones, the state-run public schools needed a unified curriculum to ensure that all children were correctly socialized. As often happens when bureaucracy reigns supreme, there came about a shift in power. Historically, a committee of men were chosen to decide upon the standardized curriculum that would define what would be taught by the female-dominated teaching profession; thus, the power was subverted from the hands of the teachers—the women who interacted with and taught the children of our nation on a daily basis—into the hands of this committee of "educated" men who were disconnected from the classroom, to say the very least:

> The 1892 report of the National Education Association (NEA) Committee of Ten marked a turning point in the process of defining the field of education as the responsibility of elite men…[They] called for a broadened core of academic subjects for students bound both for college and for work, and thus required major changes in the work of teachers. But teachers were included neither on this committee nor a subsequent NEA committee formed in 1918, which recommended that the academic core be substantially altered to sort students according to their academic talents and prospects. It was as if the Committee of Ten were oblivious to the power they were wresting away from women as well as from local communities (Hoffman, 2003, p. 15).

Needless to say, women did not appreciate not being able to create their own curriculum or being placed under the critical eye of a male administrator. One outspoken teacher named Margaret Haley addressed the NEA in 1904 comparing the professional teacher to "a mere factory hand, whose duty is to carry out mechanically and unquestioningly the ideas and orders of those clothed with the authority of position" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 244).

Many teachers recount stories of administrators terrorizing teachers: "Superintendents or their delegated authorities visited every classroom, often unannounced, and held public examinations of the pupils. Graded secretly, these examinations determined the teacher's status—her pay, her promotion, or her demotion. Indeed, so memorable were these episodes for teachers that numerous first-hand accounts of classrooms figure around a trope: males exercise power arbitrarily and maliciously over female teachers under their supervision" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 236). Marian Dogherty recounts the nitpicky-ness of her principal as he inspected her students' ability to read "properly," which she explains "was to say, 'Page 35, Chapter 4,' and holding the book in the right hand, with the toes pointing at an angle of forty-five degrees, the head held

straight and high, the eyes looking directly ahead, the pupil would lift up his voice and struggle in loud, unnatural tones" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 278). When her students failed to speak the page number and chapter before beginning reading, the principal criticized her ability to instruct: "I had failed to perform my duty and my superior officer had hinted as much with the additional suggestion that on the morrow I mend my ways. My heart sank" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 278).

Teachers were restricted in the possible creativity and subject matter of their curriculum, and yet they were criticized for not teaching their students anything. Female teachers were at once challenged by "socializing" immigrant children, who for many did not speak English outside of the classroom, and were scrutinized by power-wielding male administrators enforcing with hawk-like eyes a limited standardized curriculum. Teachers were left to focus on minute details of things rather than the whole education of the child.

For many modern teachers, the recounting of this history will sound eerily familiar. One of the largest complaints shared by teachers today is that standardized testing is out of control. Sonia Nieto (2005) provides some valuable commentary about the current state of public education, the context of which teachers cannot control:

> These are hard times for public education, which increasingly is characterized by a mean-spirited and hostile discourse, one with little respect for teachers and the young people they teach. Currently, the most common buzzwords in education are borrowed shamelessly from the business world: The school is a "market," students and families are "consumers," and teachers are "producers." In this discourse, "accountability" is proposed as the arbiter of excellence, teacher tests are the answer to "quality control," and high-stakes tests are the final judge of student learning. As a result, public schools are challenged by countless privatization scheme...even though such alternatives traditionally benefit

> students who already enjoy economic and other privileges, while they further jeopardize those who do not...There is also an increased focus on schooling as job training, and education as a vehicle to serve limited self-interests and consumerism (p. 4).

And there is no doubt for Oklahoma teachers that this is the current condition of public schooling within their state. Oklahoma students are subjected to some form of standardized testing nearly every year beginning in third grade. The "important" tests--the ones used to "grade" schools (more on this process later)--are the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT). Generally, the testing schedule is as follows: students in grades 3 through 8 are tested in reading and math; Students in grade 5 are also tested in writing, science and social studies; in middle school/junior high school, students are tested in geography, writing, science and U.S. history; high school students are required to take the OCCT End-of Instruction (EOI) tests in algebra I, algebra II, English II, English III, geometry, biology I and U.S. history upon completion of each course. In order to graduate from high school, students must pass the tests for algebra I and English II in addition to two other tests.

In all fairness, it is important to note that in May 2016, the Oklahoma House of Representatives did pass a bill eliminating the state EOI tests beginning in the 1017-18 school year. "State lawmakers have been inundated with complaints from teachers, parents and others that the 26 state and federally mandated tests that Oklahoma students currently are required to take from third grade through high school are way too many" (Ellis, 2016). The bill proposed a reduction of state-mandated testing, while still requiring the tests which are mandated by the federal government. Which sounds like a large, progressive step;

until one realized that students would still be required to take 18 standardized tests throughout their schooling. Additionally, the state Board of Education is tasked with creating new graduation requirements: “The board, in cooperation with other entities, also would be asked to develop a statewide system of student assessment, which would be subject to approval from the Oklahoma Legislature” (Ellis, 2016). This new form of student assessment has yet to be determined, but could potentially mean additional standardized testing for students.

Standardized testing has certainly taken a toll on the institution of education in Oklahoma, students and schools alike. As of 2011, the state of Oklahoma has assigned “grades” to schools (based upon the typical A-F scale) based upon how well students are performing on the OCCT tests. This “school report card” was intended to be “an indicator of the percentage of students, regardless of background, within a school who are currently meeting or exceeding grade-level academic standards, an indicator of the percentage of students (particularly the lower performing students) who are at least making significant progress toward meeting grade-level academic standards, and an indicator of whether schools are exceeding expectations in terms of school attendance, high school graduation, etc. (via the awarding of bonus points)” (Tamborski, 2013). However, according to data taken by the State Department of Education, most schools in Oklahoma are within the C, D, or F categories. Of the 1797 schools given a grade, 196 were A schools, 455 were B, 582 were C, 319 were D, and 213 were F schools. Only 32 schools were unable to be scored (OK SDEA Report Card).

When placed on a chart, like the one below, the distribution of these grades makes a very clear bell curve, which is a standard scale seen in the field of education. However, the problem with bell curves when used in education is that they are unforgiving. According to bell curves, half of the things being measured (students or schools) appear at best to be average and at worst to be failing completely. Bell curves do not measure growth or tangible intelligence or the level of "trying" of a student or a school.

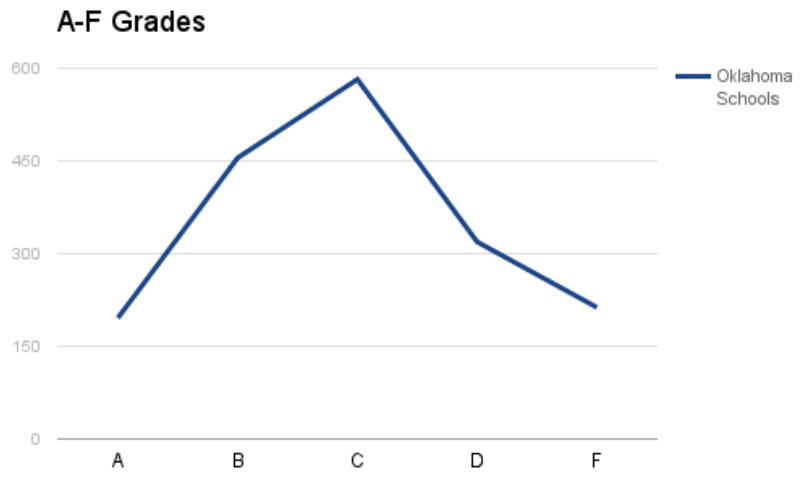


Figure 3: Bell curve concerning the A-F grades of Oklahoma schools.

A disclaimer noted on the instructions for how to go about calculating the potential grade of a school states: "Please note that the rules require the overall grade to be lowered by one letter if the school tested less than 95% of students in Reading or in Mathematics. In addition, if schools test less than 90% of students in Reading or Mathematics, the school automatically receives an overall grade of F" (OK SDE Report Card). For several of the schools this year, 12 total, these

rules apply. As one survey-taker commented: “The A-F scale has been very punishing to schools that have a transient and poor socioeconomic population. It doesn't reflect the growth that students have from year to year, only how they do on some obscure, waste-of-money testing.” It can be frustrating to school with inadequate funding, low attendance rates, higher-than-average numbers of students who require SPED or ELL services, and high teacher turnover rates to achieve the “grades” they would hope to achieve. These A-F grades can be incredibly damaging to the reputations of schools who might have been given a bad grade due to factors outside of “poor student performance.”

It also can have a significant effect on the teachers and administration of such schools. In the past, although many schools have abandoned this policy, teachers’ yearly evaluations were influenced by how well their students did on these tests (i.e. what grade the school got in certain subject for that year). Ms. Dee expressed her feelings on this: “I guess in a way it’s a good thing that they passed this law that the End of Year testing is not a part of our own teaching evaluations, and I think probably that has a lot to do with feedback they’ve gotten from teachers about how unfair that can be.” It is unfair, because many studies have concluded that standardized testing does not show schools or teachers anything they could not determine on their own (Testing in OK). When teachers’ evaluations depend upon how well their students perform on a test, it can really be limiting as to what and how students are taught. From this, “teaching to the test” and immense test anxiety are born. Ms. Allison has special knowledge of this level of fear amongst teachers because she is the the chair of the English

department at her school. She described seeing teachers under her supervision become very seriously upset, to the point of making themselves ill, when they are preparing their students for the EOI tests. She spoke of one teacher in particular who was forced to leave teaching because the pressure of testing was too much for her to handle.

Even when their jobs are not put on the line by the results of standardized testing, teachers still feel incredibly limited. Ms. Robinson describes it best: "In a perfect situation, I would like to see them do-away with all the testing that we do. It seems like, before we had all the testing we had, you could come in and you would have fun learning new concepts because you can do those concepts in so many different ways. But state testing has become, we've had more and more and they mean more and more to the schools…you don't have that opportunity to get a little side-tracked and have fun with a subject. I'd like to see us back away from the state tests and learn the math because of math not because of a stinking test." In other words, focusing so intently on how well children test kills any fun in learning. When you suppress a teacher's creativity, they begin to feel uninspired about teaching, which seems like a tone apparent in how all of the respondents to his study discussed testing. One survey-taker suggested that he/she is only respected based upon "the results my students get on tests and in college."

When so many standards and regulations are in place, the "magic" or the "art" of teaching is not needed. The craft of teaching is devalued, because teachers are reduced to "teaching to the test" and "textbook teaching." One respondent states: "Teachers have become the redhead ugly stepchild in OK. We

are made the villains and scapegoats in failing schools. We are mocked when kids don't make the scores some government official or an in-it-to-make-a-profit testing company deemed important. These people don't know how to teach but feel expert enough to judge us & implement the latest popular improvement program. Then they pull our strings like we are puppets." When your job depends on how well your students "check the boxes," so to speak, then you try not to stray too far away from the outlined testing guides, and you begin to feel replaceable.

One survey respondent said that he/she feels as if the district administration "views teachers as easily replaced." Another points out, "Lawmakers don't respect adults who have earned degrees and now want to give certification to anyone." And, indeed, it is easy to see how teachers could feel this way. You could give any untrained person a basic "how-to" guide to standardized testing, and they could probably get their students to produce roughly the same test scores as a veteran teacher could. In fact, armed with some test-taking strategies and memorization skills, most self-motivated students could teach themselves how to score highly on these tests. Ms. Allison puts it best when she says, "If the kids aren't passing [the standardized tests], then the teacher's in trouble, instead of focusing on 'is this kid successful and has he made progress?' They keep looking for some mathematical equation of a person and it doesn't work that way. I think when you stop seeing kids as people, you stop seeing their teachers as people, too."

So, why then, if it is so damaging to teachers and their students, do states like Oklahoma insist on testing their students so frequently? It all boils down to the fact that, in America, capitalism reigns supreme. Diane Ravitch (2013), a prominent voice against standardized testing, argues that the 21st century saw a tremendous level of fear about public education. The national leaders were afraid that American schools were falling behind other countries, and the public was told that public schools were failing. This level of anxiety called for the reform of public education, but this call for reform left open the door for those who were looking to privatize and capitalize on education: "But what is happening now is an astonishing development. It is not meant to reform public education but is a deliberate effort to replace public education with a privately managed, free-market system of schooling" (n.p.). Education, because it involves so many people, is unpredictable, but forcing education into a business mold seemed, for some, like it would make it more manageable, and for many more, seemed like it would be profitable.

As Ravitch explains in *Reign of Error* (2013), the anxiety about how "low-performing" American children directly correlates to the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report in 1983--under the administration of Ronald Reagan--entitled *A Nation at Risk.* "Its basic claim was that the American standard of living was threatened by the loss of major manufacturing jobs--such as automobiles, machine tools, and steel mills--to other nations, which the commission attributed to the mediocre quality of our public educational system" (n.p.). In other words, corporations and general corporate

greed and shortsightedness were not to blame for Americans losing jobs; the schools were doing a poor job educating them, so other countries were able to take the jobs. With the onset of the George W. Bush administration came the bipartisan federal legislation called No Child Left Behind (Ravitch, 2013). With this legislation, which is largely regarded as the downfall of the education system among teachers, came the institution of grading systems (like the A-F scale used in Oklahoma). Essentially, each state was required to test every child in reading and mathematics every year in grades 3 through 8. Each school's goal, by 2014, was to have every child reach the level of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Schools were penalized for failing to meet that goal, and the penalties increased with each failing year: "Eventually, if the school kept failing, it was at risk of having its staff fired or having the school closed, handed over or state control or private management, or turned into a charter school or 'any other major restructuring'" (Ravitch, 2013, n.p.).

Most schools failed; most schools failed year after year. Fearing the penalties, schools reached out for any help they could get. "[No Child Left Behind] opened the door to huge entrepreneurial opportunities. Federal funds were set aside for after-school tutoring, and thousands of tutoring companies sprang up overnight to claim a share. Many new ventures opened to advise schools on how to meet NCLB testing targets, how to analyze NCLB data, how to 'turn around' failing schools, and how to meet other goal embedded in the legislation" (Ravitch, 2013, n.p.).

The most recent damaging education legislation was Barack Obama's Race to the Top which began following his 2008 election. Essentially what Race to the Top did was set aside federal funding for education and then make schools fight to the death for it (Ravitch, 2013). Test scores, which were assumed to show how well a school was performing, determined who would receive adequate funding and who would not. Instead of helping schools to become more equal by giving funding to schools that really needed it, this program favored schools that were already well-funded (i.e. schools in wealthy areas who had easier access to materials and such) (Ravitch, 2013). This is difficult for schools in low-income areas. Schools are not equally matched sports teams, where sometimes they win and sometimes they lose. Failing schools will always fail because they are not on an equally-funded playing field. An underfunded school often cannot afford adequate learning materials, like textbooks, novels, or science equipment, cannot afford technology, like laptops or iPads, and cannot afford student sports and clubs. All of these things enrich student learning. Yet when schools are forced to compete for funding, it creates this cycle of "failure." An underfunded school one year might not have the resources for its students to adequately compete against a fully-funded school; and so when they "fail," they receive even fewer funds the next year. They continue to fail and continue to receive inadequate funding, which could make them a viable competitor.

For-profit educational organizations make gaining equality among schools all the more difficult. Companies producing testing materials were perhaps the most profitable in this culture of high-stakes testing. In addition to producing the

actual tests (paper-based and computer-based), companies like Pearson create the standards that need to be achieved by schools (in Pearson's case, the Common Core State Standards), create the study materials, and provide experts to consult with schools about how to improve schools' scores (Ravitch, 2013). And failing schools would rather shell out a little more money--taking that money from sports or extracurricular activities or repairs to the building--in order to help themselves survive one more year by getting federal funding. Labeling schools as "failing" can affect how the public perceives the schools in their community. One teacher comments: "The whole point of the "education reform" movement has been to cause public schools to fail, so corporate America can take over. A key point in this was making teachers look inept, unprofessional, lazy, and corrupt. Since the corporate backers mostly control the media, that is what the world has seen for over a decade" (Ravitch, 2013).

Teachers know that this is happening, this sort of "robbing Peter to pay Paul" deal with the test-makers. Ms. Allison comments: "It's all a money machine really. It comes down to Pearson makes a ton of money on testing and test prep, and the more they can sell that to legislators as a good thing and the more they buy it, the more it perpetuates itself. I've worked for Pearson scoring some of their stuff before, and they're just making tons of money selling all of this stuff. Everyone, all of the legislators think, 'What a good idea!' They're being sold that it's really great for kids, but they don't know the difference. They don't know what's good for kids."

At what point do we stop sacrificing learning, real valuable learning like the kind described by Ms. Robinson, for some meaningless progress on a standardized test? At what point do we stop allowing private corporations to control public education? At what point do we stop harming teachers in order to "race to the top"? Standardized testing harms students. As Ravitch (2013) explains, standardized testing sets an unattainable goal. All students cannot be proficient. By telling them that they must, we tell them that the only education we value is the "right" one. Education is so much more than what we can measure: "The tests do not measure the many dimension of intelligence, judgment, creativity, and character that may be more consequential for the student's future than his or her test score" (Ravitch, 2013). As Ms. Allison put it, "[Public education] got into that whole running-the-school-as-a-business thing and looking at the bottom line. Which doesn't work because kids aren't a business."

Chapter 5

Unionization: Teaching Becomes a Profession

It began to occur to female teachers that their "professional" status was still not being respected, and this especially came through as their ability to make decisions within their own classrooms began to be stripped away: "In granting the teacher so little agency and voice as a worker insider the school, the administrative progressives sent signals that she was not equal socially to their more educated wives and daughters" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 243). In other words, teaching had not ascended from the domestic sphere as an extension of mothering into a the public sphere as a legitimate career. To say the least, outspoken female teachers—who were also often early suffragists—generally felt as if they were being treated and paid unfairly compared to their female counterparts in other professions. Grace C. Strachan writes, "Why does the city [New York] differentiate the women it hires to take stenographic notes, use a typewriter, follow up truants, inspect a tenement, or issue a license? ...Some ask, 'Shall the single woman, in teaching, be given the married women's wage?' I do not know what they mean, But I say, 'Why not the single woman in teaching just as much as the single woman in washing, in farming, in dressmaking, in nursing, in telephoning?'" (Hoffman, 2013, 317). Single female teachers were not seen as skilled; they were "practicing" for family life. They were not getting paid as much as women in other skilled occupations, and so teachers began to organize.

Labor unions formed in nearly all large cities, like the Chicago Teacher's Federation (CTF) in Chicago and the Interborough Association of Women Teachers (IAWT) in New York City. "Union membership doubled between 1897 and 1901 to one million; and it was two million by 1904" (Hoffman, 2013, p. 244). The growth of these unions actually (perhaps surprisingly by today's standards) affected positive change in the teaching profession. The CTF "forced the state supreme court to wrest unpaid taxes from five public utility companies—money, they argued, that should have gone for teachers' raises" and sued the Board of Education for "earmarked" back taxes for school maintenance (Hoffman, 2013). The IAWT was successful in lobbying the New York governor and mayor for equal pay legislation in 1911 (Hoffman, 2003, p. 248). Before they could even vote, women teachers transformed the teaching from informal dame schools into a bona fide, equal paying profession.

Despite the progression, as women tried to gain equality in pay and status, they unintentionally sacrificed the "home" feel of school. As teaching became unionized, it also became more institutionalized and regulated. Teachers were now "workers" serving the state instead of caring educators serving the children.

The organization of Teachers' Unions began to fade as the U.S. was engulfed in World War I. As Nancy Hoffman (2003) states: "In the end teachers' goals were limited: teachers fought to protect themselves from intimidation and exploitation by supervisors, and more security. Once the twin catalysts of the labor movement and the woman movement diminished in the influence of World War I and the Great Depression loomed, teachers too retreated from activism and

out right militancy" (p. 249). Having earned the title "Professional," teachers began to use unions in a much different way.

Teaching unions are still active today, with the national union, the National Education Association (NEA) boasting three million members nation-wide and the Oklahoma-specific branch, the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) has around 40,000 members (OEA, 2011). Members of the OEA receive benefits now that mostly deal with litigation. The OEA states that their advocacy services will "offer assistance with writing responses to evaluations, admonishments or plans for improvement, assistance with individual rights and employment problems, and representation with disciplinary issues" (OEA, 2011, n.p.). While they state that they deal with collective bargaining issues, Oklahoma teachers have not gotten a raise in nearly ten years and they are not paid salaries that are equal to other states regionally or nationally; so it seems, in general, that the union is too weak to actually affect change in that way. While disappointing, this is not particularly surprising.

In their 1925 investigation into the problems of the teaching profession, John C. Almack and Albert R. Lang discuss how ineffective the NEA was at the time. They state,

> But little of the progress made has been due to conscious planning. Much of it has depended upon the initiative and effort of a few. The Association until very recently has seldom expressed itself positively upon a matter of educational policy, and then backed that policy up with persistent effort. There has been little or nothing for the great body of teachers to do except listen to lectures at the annual meeting. The membership has failed to appreciate the fact that discussion can never settle problems nor carry out plans. There has been manifest as well a disposition to look at education idealistically, and not practically. Addresses have been largely of the

> pulpit or of the political type. They are good reading, but a little bit too highly generalized to result in action (p. 81).

And for the modern iteration of the NEA, this seems to ring true. Both in the public and among teachers, there seems to be a heavy skepticism about teacher's unions. When teachers complain and complain, but nothing changes, the public perception of the teachers' union becomes negative. Many teachers believe that the public thinks that teachers are "whiners" and that they use the union to attempt to bully more money out of the state. One survey-taker reported that the media sometimes gets involved in order to stir up controversy: "...The Oklahoman refers to us as union thugs only out to make more money, I know it affects overall perception." Another teacher tells of their experience concerning how the media has affected how the public views teachers: "One parent got upset because she read an article about teachers being underpaid and ended up spending some of our parent-teacher conference time whining about teachers only working nine months a year and getting paid enough. Since I regularly attend summer PD [professional development], I was offended, but that seems to be a misconception people have."

Teachers, more than anything, feel as if they are over-worked. Most feel like they are on the verge of being abused because they work many, many hours over what they are contracted to work just to ensure that their job is done properly. A typical "contract" week for a teacher might be Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. each day, with a planning period included. This is a total of 40 work hours per week. However, as the following teachers explain, this is not nearly enough time when the duties placed upon teacher

exceed simply teaching and grading. One teacher reports, “I work from 7:30 [a.m.] until 6 [p.m.] most nights and sometimes as late as 9 [p.m.] at my school. Sunday afternoons are always spent at school preparing for the next week.” Referencing public perception, another survey-taker responds, “There are way too many people who still think teachers have cushy jobs where we work 7 hours a day and have lots of holidays and summers off so don't deserve to make a salary comparable to other professionals. The level of education, dedication, professional development, blood, sweat, and tears along with the number of extra hours that most teachers actually work is grossly undervalued.”

On top of just the general extra time taken, two teachers report being asked (or, rather, obliged) to taking on a plethora of tasks. The first teacher essentially lists her duties: “I believe people do not understand all that teaching entails. We must teach not only our subject area but life skills which use to be taught at home. We teach all levels and socioeconomic statuses in one classroom. We teach 20-30 of these students at once. Then we must put lesson plans and grades on the computer, keep up with who is absent and make up work for when they return, which student receives modified work and which receives modified grading. We must grade papers, fill out IEP paperwork, file work into student progress folders, keep up with the ever changing standards and testing blueprints, make weekly parent contacts because they don't contact the teacher any longer, and make department meetings. We have to meet with other subjects to create cross curricular assignments and meet with the grades below and above for curriculum alignment. We have to research the new learning disabilities and

medical conditions of all 140 students we have each day. But....none of that is seen by the public because we still make it to our own children's activities and make time to support our students in theirs. We are still active in our community and go above beyond at church. So if we have that much free time, teaching must be easy. Right?" The next teacher describes being asked to engage in activities that are well outside the scope of his/her job: "I have hours of extra work planning and grading that can't be accomplished during the day if I am being an active and involved teacher. The demands of extra duty working concession stands and keeping gate for basketball are demeaning. Selling frozen foods, Rada products or gift wrap and popcorn are also kind [of] humiliating and not why I wanted to get into the profession."

But for some, including Ms. Allison, one of the interviewee teachers, the most disrespectful and wasteful extra duties is to be asked to attend a department meeting and/or a professional development meeting which is neither relevant to you as a teacher or is squandering of time. Ms. Allison describes one such event: "I think when I have to go to inane meetings that are supposed to be about professional development, but really just filling in a blank somewhere or doing it because they have to have a meeting." She also described a professional development meeting in her journal. She generally says that they played some "team building" games that were completely irrelevant to teaching, watched a funny video that was completely irrelevant to teaching, and then talked about the student dress code, test scores, and how teachers should always make themselves available for announcements, phone calls, emails, and school assemblies. Her

overall impression of what she was being told was, “There. We appreciate you. Have some candy. And don’t complain about our policies or actions. Don’t question the relevance of any of this.”

“Well,” one might say, “All of these things are just a teacher’s job. They just shouldn’t complain about it. It’s what they signed up for, after all.” No, it is not. The great number of extra duties piled on top of teachers would nearly be like asking a highly-qualified, highly-educated CEO of a corporation to do her job, but also help new hires to fill out their Human Relations paperwork and to keep track of the progress of all of the salespeople associated with the company and to be the nighttime security guard and to clean all of the bathrooms on the fifth and sixth floor, without receiving any pay raise or stipend or overtime pay.

If teachers are being treated unfairly, what can they do? To answer this question, I return to Almack and Lang (1925). While it did indeed seem like they were rather harsh when discussing the NEA, what they say does have some truth. In any organization, discussing the problem does not fix the problem. I am in no way trying to undermine the importance of teachers’ unions because they do serve an invaluable purpose. I am suggesting that teachers get more involved in their union, take leadership roles, and have their voices truly heard. They have to organize, to become one voice, in order to say, (as one teacher pleaded), “Listen to us, the voices in the trenches.”

Creating a very specific set of attainable goals, as Almack and Lang suggest, is vital to enacting change (1925, p. 81). Making small but positive steps forward can only help public perception. If people see that teachers will not allow

themselves to be taken advantage of, that they have the best intentions for everyone (students and parents included) and that they are professionals who are worthy of respect, then maybe the public--who teachers believe have a general negative outlook on teachers, unions, and educational policy--will be convinced to, as one survey-take put it, “Vote your brain and heart, not someone else's lies.”

Conclusions

There is, unfortunately, no neat-and-tidy way to conclude this study. The results of this study produced opinions about why teachers feel disrespected, but, like most things in life, there is no one solution, no one fix. In one way or another, teachers will always be confronted with disrespect; there will always be a rude student, there will always be an overbearing parent, there will always be clashes with administrators, there will always be public citizens who blame teachers for "failing" students, and there will always be lawmakers with ulterior motives for public education. While I cannot offer a solution, I can report what I have learned during this study and conclude with parting words of wisdom and advice from the experts, Oklahoma teachers themselves.

Questions for Further Study

In no way do I pretend that the research conducted in this study comes close to resolving all the issues and answering all the questions of education. It is a vast field with so much and so many people at stake. Having acknowledged this, there are many avenues that could be explored and would increase the effectiveness and completeness of this study.

First, it would be interesting to gather the perspectives of all of the non-teacher groups who are involved in education, like students and parents. They could offer differing perspectives of teacher respect, including if they feel their teachers are respected or disrespected.

Secondly, I believe that it would be more than worthwhile to explore and to seek out feasible ways to raise teacher pay. Offering viable options to legislators can only aid the situation.

Thirdly, it would be interesting to consider factors, beside pay, that draw Oklahoma teachers to other states. Are Texas teachers respected more? Do Arkansas teachers receive more benefits?

Finally, I would like to explore teacher's unions. Do teachers really utilize them as they should? Are the unions helpful to teachers outside of litigation protection?

I think answers to these questions could enhance the wholeness of this research and also help to answer the question I am left with at the end of this study: What can we do to improve the quality of the profession of teaching for Oklahoma teachers?

What I Have Learned

The most important thing that I have taken from this study is that Oklahoma teachers, while they love teaching, their students, and (most often) their peers, they feel like the state of Oklahoma has failed them. They are upset and angry and hurt. They do not feel like they are treated like educated professionals.

Teachers do not feel respected by students, and largely they blame the parents for this lack of respect. The responses received from many teachers seemed to show a generational divide, which I believe even younger teachers feel sometimes. My overall impression of this is expressed best by Ms. Robinson. She

described how, when she was a student, she was taught to respect teachers to the point of fear; she says that if she ever saw her teacher outside of the classroom, she would not feel worthy of talking to the teacher because, as she says, she was "just this little pee-on" in the presence of a respectable person. While this is a rather extreme example of a student's respect, it is important to note that many teachers, like Ms. Dee, really struggle with earning respect from students. Many teachers feel like they do not have to earn it; they should simply be given the respect as the educator and as the adult in the room. To an extent, I agree with this sentiment. Ms. Allison says, "I think that it's not just disrespect for teachers; it's disrespect for each other in our society. We're just not nice to each other anymore." And that is how she receives respect from her students; she is overwhelmingly polite and kind to them. That is my biggest take-away concerning students and what I will strive for as I enter the teaching field.

Ms. Robinson reported a very important and touching epiphany during this study. She told me that as we discussed respect and gaining the respect of parents, who she felt respected her the least, she began to reflect on why she was feeling so disrespected. She was dealing with a disruptive student and an uncooperative parent. She was frustrated until she realized that the parent was denying her requests for the student to stay after school, not because the parent did not care about the student or because she was disrespecting Ms. Robinson, but because the parent did not have a way to pick the child up from school and was too proud or too ashamed to admit it. Ms. Robinson says, "I would, like I said, even sharing with my little girl [the student] this past week, I think talking to parents more,

seeing their side. I think that is one thing I'm really going to try to work on for myself...I think, you know, you don't know where they're coming from unless you walk a mile in their shoes, and I don't think I could do that. But, at the same time, I think it that if I find out a little bit more about them, it kind of helps that situation."

Teachers have to always remember that teaching, when you boil it down, is really taking care of people. People can be hurt by what we say, people can have unforeseen problems, and people make mistakes. In order to earn respect from parents and students, we have to take a step back to try to see their perspective. The best way to conquer the monster of disrespect is to make it obvious that you care. As many teachers suggested, we must be genuinely kind, polite, and respectful.

As far as community perception and increasingly disrespectful legislation and lack of pay are concerned within this large problem of disrespect, I believe that both issues can be attacked simultaneously. Teachers are under constant scrutiny from the community. There is double standard that teachers have to remain perfect in the classroom and in the community. If a parent, for instance, sees their student's teacher out at the local bar or is offended by their student's teacher's social media post, that could cause a lot of problems for the teacher, when really neither of those would reflect how effective they are at their job. Because of this double standard, Ms. Allison intentionally lives far away from the school in which she teaches: "I purposefully live 20 miles from my school. I shop in a different town. I go to church in a different town. I just…I don't…Nobody

calls me Ms. [Allison] when I'm not at school because I'm always somewhere else. And really, I should be a part of the community and part of the parents and talking to them and all that, but it's just so dangerous now. I could lose my job tomorrow if I just put a picture of myself in a halter-top on Facebook. Well, nobody wants to see that but… I'm not allowed to have an opinion. I couldn't comment on the debate tonight because somebody might take it the wrong way." While this is a struggle for teachers, I do not agree that retreating from the school's community is the solution.

If teachers are not present in the community, then they cannot refute the negative perception of teachers that community might have. Alongside the A through F grading scale, many schools in Oklahoma, as well as the state in general, is labeled "failing." Of course the public is going to view public schools in a negative light. We need positive voices in the communities of these sc

hools. We cannot hide from the misconceptions; we have to fight them. If schools open their doors to community members and teachers are more present, then perhaps the public will come to understand that the way schools are evaluated is misleading. Maybe then, teacher and public schools alike will have public support when new legislation is presented that would raise teacher pay or allocate resources to schools.

Many Oklahoma teachers, as well as the OEA, are engaged in exactly this type of campaign currently. With the election upcoming, Oklahomans will have the chance to vote on legislation that will help to raise teachers' salaries. Social media has been currently flooded with material urging voters to ignore the

negative publicity surrounding this bill, which many of the posts have outright called lies.

Many survey participants complained that the public does not understand what teachers actually do; but this is only because they do not know. Teachers have to advocate for themselves and educate those around them. Small changes have to be made before big changes will happen.

Words of Wisdom

To conclude the interview process with Ms. Dee, Ms. Allison, and Ms. Robinson, I asked one final question to each of them: After considering the topic of teacher respect over the past couple of weeks, what do you think teachers can do to gain more respect in this state? Each of them responded with a powerful final thought.

Always concerned with being a positive influence on her students, Ms. Dee said: "I think by regaining a positive voice and pushing the issues that teachers are passionate about. And giving real examples of their experiences and voicing problems and concerns. That's all we can do. That and just continuing to teach to the best of our ability and being role models in our community. What else can we do?"

Ms. Allison suggested that positivity is always the key to change: "I think we need to talk more. We've been very quiet about how important this job is to us, how much we've invested in it—not just emotionally, but educationally and financially—and how much it really means to us. That this is not a job. It's a

calling, a ministry. And, 'Your kid matters. Your kid is the most important kid I know.' And if we just start saying positive things. We have to yell louder than the TV does, and we have to smile more. I don't think that the negativity is going to help us."

Ms. Robinson summed it up briefly and to-the-point: "You know, I kind of think just being more outspoken. Letting the word out, I think."

This study which began as a simple case study to explore why Oklahoma teachers were feeling so disrespected has become so much more. It has become a journey of self-exploration. Sometimes, I have felt sad and disheartened by the overwhelming sense of despair Oklahoma teachers feel; but ultimately, I have found great strength and power in uncovering the disrespect teachers feel. Giving them a voice has been cathartic. And with this, I am taking the advice of the teachers who helped to guide me on my path: I am letting the word out. I collected the voices of teachers from all over the state, and hopefully now, we are loud enough to be heard.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. In which type of district do you work?

3. How would you rate the level of respect you receive as a teacher in general?

4. Teacher might feel disrespected from many different groups of people. In your experience or the experience of your peers, how would you rank the following groups of people based upon how disrespectful teachers might feel they are? 1 is the least respectful and 5 is the most respectful.

5. Do you feel respected as a professional within your school? Please explain your response.

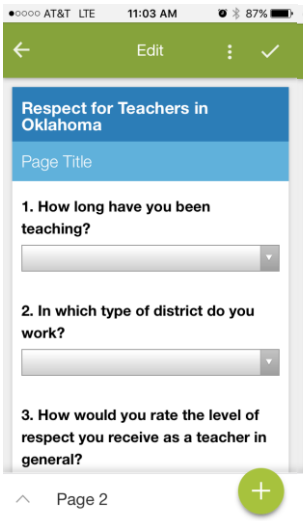
6. Do you feel respected as a professional within the state of Oklahoma? Please explain your response.

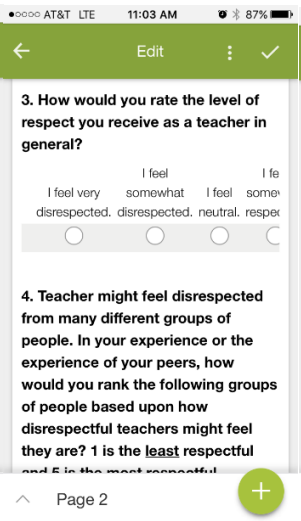
7. Do you believe that the public perceives teachers in a positive way?

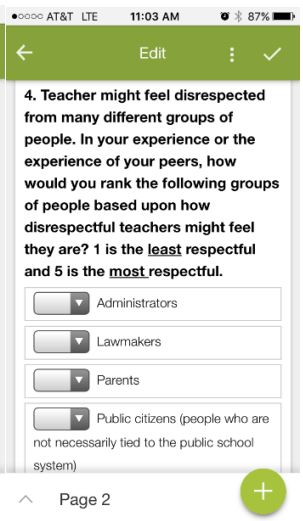
8. In your opinion, do teachers receive the level of respect they deserve? Why or why not?

9. Do you think teachers could do more to earn respect from the public, from parents and students, from lawmakers, or from administrators?

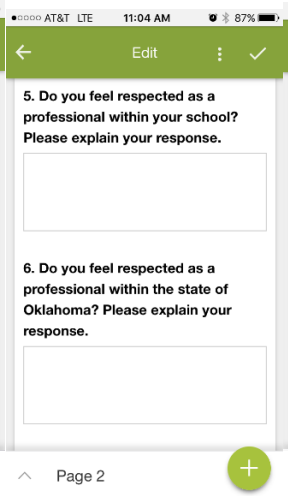
10. Do you have any further comments about respect for Oklahoma's teachers?

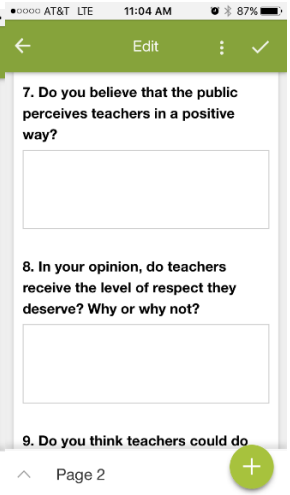

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Respect for Teachers in Oklahoma
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1. How long have you been teaching?
2. In which type of district do you work?
3. How would you rate the level of respect you receive as a teacher in general?
Page 2

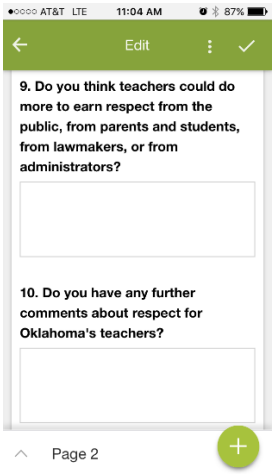

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3. How would you rate the level of respect you receive as a teacher in general?
I feel very disrespected.
I feel somewhat disrespected.
I feel neutral.
4. Teacher might feel disrespected from many different groups of people. In your experience or the experience of your peers, how would you rank the following groups of people based upon how disrespectful teachers might feel they are? 1 is the least respectful and 5 is the most respectful.
Page 2


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4. Teacher might feel disrespected from many different groups of people. In your experience or the experience of your peers, how would you rank the following groups of people based upon how disrespectful teachers might feel they are? 1 is the least respectful and 5 is the most respectful.
Administrators
Lawmakers
Parents
Public citizens (people who are not necessarily tied to the public school system)
Page 2


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experience of your peers, how would you rank the following groups of people based upon how disrespectful teachers might feel they are? 1 is the least respectful and 5 is the most respectful.
Administrators
Lawmakers
Parents
Public citizens (people who are not necessarily tied to the public school system)
Students
Page 2


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5. Do you feel respected as a professional within your school? Please explain your response.
6. Do you feel respected as a professional within the state of Oklahoma? Please explain your response.
Page 2


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7. Do you believe that the public perceives teachers in a positive way?
8. In your opinion, do teachers receive the level of respect they deserve? Why or why not?
9. Do you think teachers could do
Page 2


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9. Do you think teachers could do more to earn respect from the public, from parents and students, from lawmakers, or from administrators?
10. Do you have any further comments about respect for Oklahoma's teachers?
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Appendix B: Interviews

Ms. Dee: Interview 1 (modified transcript)

Me: My first question to you is a pretty basic question to try to get us set up. Do you feel respected as a professional within your school?

Ms. Dee*:* Yes. I would say I do feel respected as a professional in my school, but it definitely varies. I think that in certain classes and with certain students you get different levels of respect. Sometimes it's more about gaining that respect with students. And as far as a professional amongst peers, like other teachers and administrators, I do feel respected in my school, yeah.

Me: Just within your own school you feel like it's mostly the students who are maybe a little more disrespectful, and not so much the teachers and administrators?

D: I think so, yes.

Me. Okay. What about within the entire district? You work for a huge district. Do you feel like you're valued as a professional?

D: Well, I think that it's difficult because there's definitely a revolving door of teachers. There isn't a high retention rate. I think that is for a reason. I think that teachers feel like they're not being supported enough, especially when you work in an inner-city school where they're lots of difficulties that come with that. And sometimes, also, as a teacher it's hard to really know what's going on beyond the classroom and school level. So I guess as a teacher you're always kind of looking for that transparency, but it's hard to know if you always really have that. Does that make sense?

Me: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, we have one of the worst retention rates in the entire country, so I can imagine that it's hard to build up that level of respect for your knowledge if you constantly have new teachers coming in, kind of undermining any kind of clout you've earned. And so my last question, as far as this line of questioning goes, is how do you feel teachers are respected within our state? We get a bad rap for, you know on one hand not doing enough but on the other hand we want all this pay and stuff. Do you have any thoughts about that?

D: Within the state of Oklahoma?

Me: Yes.

D: I think that because Oklahoma is not a state that has a lot of academic success in general, like we're not the highest achieving, I think that in the community in

general—people outside of education—definitely have a warped perspective of not respecting teachers, because of that. I think that it's hard to work in a state where that is happening.

Me: Do you have any thoughts about where this level of disrespect from the public is coming from?

D: Can you give me more? What do you mean?
Me: Well, I mean people who don't work inside schools, they have to be getting a negative impression of teachers from somewhere. Do you think it's coming from maybe the media or they just kind of have a bad….

D: I think it comes from their own experiences, their own high school experiences, their experiences within the public school system. Because certainly there are teachers who are professionals, who should be respected and who are great at their job. But then there are other people who do the minimum to get by, and they don't always maybe deserve that respect. So I guess, teachers as a whole could get a bad rep just based on individuals.

Me: Yeah, I think that's a good point. My next question kind of has a little bit of a caveat in front of it. Our state attrition rate, as far as the last I can see, is closer to 15%. Which means that…This is not counting new teachers; this is teachers who have been in the profession and left it. It's at 15%. What keeps you teaching in Oklahoma?

D: I think it just takes the will and the persistence to want to do it and to want to keep getting better. Certainly, I've had moments where I've thought, very recently, "Wow. Is this what I want to be doing?" It's hard when you're in a classroom with students who don't fully respect you yet, and you're trying to get through to them, but on a day-to-day level it's really hard. And so…sorry, what was the question again?

Me: It was just: what keeps you teaching in Oklahoma?

D: Yeah. Yeah. I think that having the mindset of wanting to continue to improve is something that I've kind of taken on myself. It's something that comes internally. And if you're not fully invested, then when it gets rough, you're going to want to find a different career, a different avenue to explore. I think that also being in a school where the students really need good teachers and there isn't a high retention rate, you feel responsibility to want to keep going because if you quit you're a part of the same problem and the same cycle. So realizing that and seeing the effect it has, the immense effect that it has, when a teacher quits and leaves students in the middle of the year or whatever the situation may be. That makes you want to keep going.

Me: My next question to you was: what keeps you urban? But I think you answered that one. It's that feeling that what you're doing is valuable, at least to your students even if they don't really know it. Okay, so tell me about a time when you felt truly valued as an educator.

D: I think that I feel most truly valued as an educator when students…like last year when I had students fill out an end-of-the-year survey where they gave me their thoughts. I encouraged them to be completely honest. And of course you always tend to get a mixture of positive and a few negative mixed in there. But, overwhelmingly, I got positive of feedback from students, and that made me feel valued as a teacher. It is hard to see each day that you're in it, each individual day, but when students can come to you and really express that you've helped them learn, that they respect you as a teacher, when they say things like, "You always look like you know what to do and you've done such a great job," that just makes you feel valued.

Me: Okay, good. And can you tell me about a time when you didn't feel valued as an educator?

D: I think that, like I said, working in a school district like I do, in an inner-city school, it takes a lot more time to gain the respect of students. You've had to build these relationships with them. Even this year, I have a few particular classes who…it's just not there immediately, that relationship and that respect, it's just not there. So sometimes it's a power struggle trying to get them to sit down and listen and be respectful and not talk when you're talking and these kinds of things in the classroom. And sometimes that can be so, so frustrating and overwhelming. Sometimes I'm like, "How am I ever going to make this better?" So I think that's what every teacher feels at some point.

Me: Sure. And so this question, I don't mean to offend you at all, but you're a pretty petite woman. Do you feel like because you are petite and you are cute and you are blonde, do you think that has an effect with your male students? Do you see any difference?

D: I think it has an effect with all students. It can be a positive thing or a negative thing, like "Oh, she's so cute and we love her." But no matter what, no matter male or female, I think that it takes more for me to earn that respect as an authority figure. I hope that as I get older and as I continue to teach that's kind of going to go away, because maybe I do look young or whatever. I'm petite. All of my students are way taller than me. So yeah, coming in as a big, male teacher who's kind of tall can be an advantage, but at the same time, being a teacher, you have to put on a little bit of a show. You have to show your personality and make it big even if you're not feeling that way. You just kind of have to try to put it on, and let them know, "Hey, I'm in charge. I know everything that's going on." In that way, it's more about your personality. But I definitely think that people who have different attributes might seem themselves as having an advantage over me.

Me: Sure. I'm going to ask you sort of the same question about any male administrators that you've come into contact with or even your peer teachers. Because this is kind of a touchy question, if you don't want to answer it, you can opt out of that one. In Oklahoma, especially, we have significantly more male administrators, especially in secondary schools. I know that can be kind of difficult. Have you ever experienced anything that would make you feel like, "I don't want to work under a male administrator"? Or maybe it's been a positive experience? Do you mind telling me about that?

D: That is kind of a tough question. Honestly, I don't really know if I have an answer for that. I think that it's a case-by-case basis based on the individual. I've really only had two different principals, both of them males, and a variety of other administrators. But no, I really don't see that there's too big of a difference between male and female. I think that I've gotten along with and respected different administrators both male and female.

Me: Okay. Good. I'm glad to hear that. So here is another big question, and this might take also take a little bit of thinking and working through. What do you think Oklahoma teachers can do to improve their situation right now?

D: What do you mean by their situation?
Me: I mean, we've got lots of young teachers fleeing the state and not choosing to work here because the pay is so low; we've got veteran teachers who don't want to be teaching anymore because the pay is so low and they just feel overwhelmed and disrespected. First of all, I guess do you think we have significant enough problems that teachers should be worried?

D: So you're saying, "Should teachers be worried in this state because of the pay gap"? Well yeah, I think it's kind of obvious that many of our best teachers do flee to different areas and different states, but as a teacher, that's something that's just beyond your control. I know that I'm not going to be in Oklahoma forever. I know that I'm probably going to move states eventually. My husband is going to have to move for his job so vicariously through him, I'll be moving. It kind of comes back to it being a choice. You have to really want to do it for the rest of your life for your own reasons. If money is motivating you, then you don't want to work in this state as a teacher. So in some ways, that means that some teachers who are staying for a long time are really passionate about teaching and helping students. I guess you can look at it that way. It's frustrating as a teacher to not feel like you have control over all of the bureaucratic things that are going on that are affecting your career. For sure.

Me: So I've launched this online survey, and it's been circulating the ELAOK Facebook page. The responses I've gotten back…I've gotten lots of responses from what I'm assuming are single women or women who are the breadwinners in their families, and they've been telling me, what are really, horror stories about how they

can't even focus on teaching because they're worried about what they're going to feed their kids and all kinds of stuff. Do you think we'll get to a point, especially in this state which has the lowest teacher pay rate, where it's going to be mostly teachers who have some sort of income, so like mostly married women who have some sort of outside income? Or do you think we'll always be able to have teachers who are varied in experience and varied in background? That was kind of a drawn-out question.

D: Sorry, Kody. I'm kind of confused on this question.

Me: No, that's ok. I guess my question was about…you know…I'm beginning to grow really concerned about teachers who maybe don't have another source of income who are maybe unmarried or whatever. I've had lots of teachers telling me that they're thinking about leaving the profession because they could be making more money anywhere else. And so that kind of makes me think that we're kind of leaning down this path where we're going to get teachers who are…I mean we already have mostly white, mostly married teachers in Oklahoma, but I think we're kind of leaning down this path of having only white, only married, 30-something teachers because that's all we can afford.

D: Yeah, I think that's a huge problem. I think it's always been like that in education, that it's always been primarily female teachers, probably white female teachers. Maybe we do see that more in Oklahoma than in other states. It's so important for students to see a diversity of people of different cultures, with different experiences, both male and female perspectives from their authority figures and teachers. Sure, that is a huge concern because students aren't going to get the best education they can get with only one type of perspective.
Me: Do you think that maybe has any effect on teacher respect just having one type of teacher?

D: Yeah, I would think so. I would think the two ideas would definitely be related because…I don't know. That's a little hard to explain. But I think from the student perspective, they're going to be valuing you more maybe if they see a variety of different types of teachers with different backgrounds versus maybe seeing their teachers and authority figures as one cookie-cutter type of person. And maybe that's fair and maybe it's not fair, but that might be their perspective.

Me: Yeah. Yeah, I'm worried that we're going to get to—and we're kind of already there—but I'm worried that we're going to get to the point where our Oklahoma students feel like, "My teachers don't look like me, so how can they teach me anything?" Which is really troubling, I think. It's troubling when we can't attract teachers from all different backgrounds.

D: I have to say, at my school—and you've been to [redacted] High School—I don't think overwhelmingly it is like that too much. I think that we have a pretty diverse

set of teachers, male and female, of different ethnic backgrounds. So certainly…there's that.

Me: I think where schools that are as big as [redacted] run into problems is teacher turnover. They always have a brand new teacher, and I think that can be really hard for students.

D: Absolutely. I've been at [redacted] for four years, well 3 ½ years, and every year has been so different. The teacher turnover rate is so crazy. It affects the way we teach so much because now you have a set of teachers, even just on an English team, who are having department meetings or just discussing things like vertical and horizontal alignment and making these plans, but then what happens is teachers are gone and a new set come in and it's like starting over. Completely from scratch. It's frustrating.

Me: It's hard to build a good repertoire for what you can teach because you're starting over every time, so you don't get the stock lessons that veteran teachers have.

D: And not only that, but the state is always changing the standards and the way that we're going to do things. That makes it more difficult too.

Me: Remind me how long you've been teaching.

D: I've been teaching for 3 ½ years. I started at [redacted] in January of 2014.

Me: Have you seen any change in teacher respect over those 3 ½ years? Or has it pretty much been consistent?

D: Yes, I think that…yes and no. It's a hard question. I think my perspective is always a little bit different depending on the group that I teach. I taught 9th graders, and then I taught juniors, and then sophomores that were honors students, and now I have English Enhancement for regular sophomores. Depending on the group, they have different strengths and weaknesses and different attitudes and behaviors that are natural for those certain groups. As a school in general, I think that maybe it's gotten a little bit better as far as students' respect level in some ways. This idea of promoting more of a college-going culture, students just seeing successes within their own peers kind of helps to form a stronger school culture. But I don't think that it's ever consistent; it changes every year. In a weird way. I'm sorry if my answers aren't that great.

Me: Oh, no no no. They're fine. They're great. So we've talked about students, and we've talked about administrators, and the general public. So I want to ask you about parents. I can just tell by my online survey that this is touchy for a lot of teachers, and I know at [redacted] you're kind of required to make so much contact with parents. I'm sure this is different depending on the area you teach in—the area

of the state—but how do you gage the level of respect that the parents you interact with feel toward you?

D: I think it's pretty obvious from the first time that you contact a parent, that the parent is willing to listen and wants to ask questions. I even had a parent this year who I called home for a minor thing about student behavior in the classroom, and that mom immediately came up to the school and met with me and the student. That was great. And then you have other times where the parent gives you the generic, "Okay, I'll talk to them," and the student comes back and there isn't any change in them. It's particularly hard at [redacted] because there are so many Spanish-speaking parents. Another challenge is to reach them and to communicate with them with the language barrier. But it varies. We just had parent-teacher conferences, and I think I had maybe 15 parents and I have about 120 students. So there's not a lot of parent involvement. I think that's natural in high school to a certain point, and then with our demographic, a lot of parents work and just can't make it or whatever the case may be.

Me: But you don't feel generally negative toward parents like some of my online survey-takers do?

D: Not at my school, no. I generally feel respect from the parents. If I tell a parent, "This student has been doing X behavior," they side with the teacher versus the student. Sometimes, I know and I hear from other teachers in different schools or different districts, that that could be the case.

Me: I've definitely had—and I'm suspecting that this comes from suburban schools—but I've had survey-takers saying that the parents are the worst. So I'm glad that's not the case always. The last group I want to touch on—and then I have a couple of other questions—are our wonderful Oklahoma state lawmakers. The overwhelming consensus is that they have no idea what they're talking about. But I guess my question is, because I'm sure that's your opinion too because that's most people's opinion, do you think that this disregard for what teachers need and what teachers want comes from us, as a public, electing bad lawmakers or do you think there are other interests that they are trying to pursue beside education? Do you have any thoughts about that?

D: Yeah, I probably think both of those things are true. It's such a complicated problem because the job in-and-of-itself is so complex and so hard that I don't think there could be anyone in charge who could make it run perfectly smoothly and give every teacher exactly…make it exactly how everyone wants it to be. On the school level, we can create a classroom environment that we think works best for our students. The most frustrating part for me is how every year it changes, the standards change, the way they want us to test changes. I guess in a way it's a good thing that they passed this law that the End of Year testing is not a part of our own teaching evaluations, and I think probably that has a lot to do with feedback they've gotten from teachers about how unfair that can be.

Me: I think it also has something to do with having an actual educator as our State Superintendent instead of a dentist.

D: Sure. Definitely. That would make sense.

Me: Oh, so tell me about when [redacted] students walked out last year and were protesting?

D: Oh yeah. So they had a walk-out because they understood that because of the budget cuts a lot of things were being cut as far as the athletic department and things. So the students got together and decided that they were going to walk out, and actually I viewed it as a positive thing. I thought it was really cool that the students were able to come together and wanted to stand up and have a voice. I don't know if necessarily all of the students that walked out that day got that or committed fully. But I viewed it as a positive thing and I think that shows that we're teaching students to be self-advocates. That's a great thing.

Me: I was definitely cheering them on. I thought that was great. I think that all it takes is…if teachers aren't able to get the message across, maybe students will. I'm glad that it happened. What it something that students had been talking about for a while, do you know?

D: I don't know. I think it happened pretty quick. I think there was a particular senior or a particular group of upperclassmen who kind of had this idea, organized it and put it together. The other students followed very quickly with this idea of walking out. I don't think it was something that had been in the works for long.

Me: I think that's great of them. I'm glad they did. I just have a couple more questions for you. Have you had or ever considered another career beside teaching?

D: I really haven't. I went to school and got my degree in English and got certified to teach. I went straight into teaching and I've stuck with it. I've certainly thought about what other skills do I have and what else could I do if I decided that I wanted to do something else, but I really like teaching, I really like being in education. I think that probably the path that I want to go on is to keep teaching in the classroom for a number of years, and then move on to something else within education, whether they be to become some type of curriculum specialist or something like that. But no, I haven't. This has been my only career. My only serious career.

Me: Would you ever run for office?

D: No, I don't think so.

Me: I heard that there were like 31 educators that are running for office this term, which I thought was just mind-blowing and fantastic. What advice would you give to new teachers or to people who are considering becoming teachers?

D: What advice would I give? I would say, first of all, if you want to become a teacher you have to be willing to be flexible and to not expect to go into the classroom and for everything to be perfect. It's a learning curve. You really only learn from your mistakes as a teacher. Each year it gets a little bit better. Hopefully, more new teachers can learn that so we can have less of a horrible retention rate. Because it is difficult, and it's kind of an art. It's a little bit of a science and little bit of an art where you kind of have to learn what works and what works for you and your personality and your teaching style and your philosophy. It does not come instantly. Yeah, so I think that's the biggest thing.

Me: I think that's solid advice. This is my last question, and then I'll give you the floor if you want to say anything further. What would be the best and what would be the worst case scenario for Oklahoma teachers within the next five years?

D: That's a hard question. The best and worst case scenario?

Me: Yeah.

D: I guess…I guess the worst case scenario would be for things to stay the same the way they are and not improve at all. The best case scenario would be for more legislation to pass that would be on the teacher's' side, that is actually listening to teacher voices to improve our education system. Because like you said, Oklahoma is at the bottom of the barrel, and things aren't working right now maybe like they should be. If there aren't changes in place and happening, then it's not going to get better. What ideas or perspectives do you have? Because I almost feel like you're more knowledgeable than I about it.

Me: Oh, no. I think that was a solid answer. I guess worst case scenario, pay cuts and budget cuts continue to increase.

D: And I feel like the probably will to a certain degree. Maybe I'm wrong, but I feel like the budget cuts aren't over. We've been told that as teachers, but this really isn't it. There are more to come. But I hope that's not the case.

Me: Yeah. I think best case scenario, immediately, is for us to actually get educators or people who are sympathetic to education into office and we start promoting those people. It takes a village, I think, to kind of get us to where we need to be. Hopefully someday. Ohio and Colorado teachers make double what we ever will.

D: That's very sad.

Me: I know. It is sad. Okay, I've kept you for about 40 minutes. Do you have any final thoughts or any other questions for me about any of this crazy stuff I'm asking you to do for me?

D: Wow. That was the fastest 40 minutes. No, I don't have any other questions or comments. If I think of anything, I'll let you know. Keep giving me information about what you want me to do and stuff.

Me: Okay. Let me stop this recording really quickly.

Ms. Dee: Interview 2 (modified transcription)

Me: You got a chance to look over my questions.

Ms. Dee: Yes, briefly.

Me: I did add a couple just as I was sitting here thinking about it, but I didn't make it too much longer. First, tell me a little bit about some things that you've been writing in your journal. Was that okay? Did everything go okay with that?

D: Yeah, I wrote about little instances where I personally felt disrespected by students or some things that I noticed helped students be more respectful. For example, remembering to give students reminders even about little things that maybe seem kind of silly at the time, like throwing trash on the floor. Really taking the time out to talk to the student, like saying, "Hey, Christopher. You did this, and it made me feel this way," makes a different. If you don't take a second to say that to them, they think you don't notice or that it doesn't matter to you. Those are some of the things I wrote down.

Me: Okay, great. So tell me about whatever the biggest form of disrespect you felt over the past couple of weeks.

D: In general, I have two class periods that are hard to manage. What they do to disrespect me is to talk while I'm talking and missing directions, which interrupts class. That I view as bad and annoying and hard to deal with and disrespectful, but I don't view that as more disrespectful as some things that I've encountered. For example, I have a few female students in one of those tough class periods who give me a lot of attitude. One student in particular, last week she called me up to her and was really trying to get my attention, and she was irritated that I didn't immediately go to her and answer whatever question she had. I was right in the middle of teaching. She told me about how I was a disorganized teacher and how everyone in her other English class was talking about it, talking about this and that and how all we do is Empower3000. This is a student who has always given me a lot of attitude, so I kind of take it with a grain of salt. In reality, we were doing quite a few Empowers that week because they were doing make-up work, so if they'd missed things, they had to be online doing those assignments. I'm required to assign two per week. A lot of her complaints weren't valid. When a student says that kind of thing to you, it does kind of hurt your feelings, and you feel disrespected. I don't know why I have had that in my mind all weekend, been upset all weekend about it even though I shouldn't have. I did talk with [paired English teacher], and she just off-hand gave me a comment like, "Oh, the students are saying that you're tougher on them than me." I think, in reality, the students are just saying, "We do more work in Enhancement than we do in regular English class." In there, they're reading a book. They're reading a fun novel, like The Perks of Being A Wallflower. Doing

fun stuff like that, which they're really enjoying. Today, I gave that same student some work in ISS, which I believe I'm the person that put her in ISS because I wrote her up for being on her phone in my class (which she does). I handed her the work we were doing that day, and I said, "Here you go. Do you have any questions?" She said, "I don't want to do it." I said, "Okay. I'm just giving it to you so that you have the opportunity in case you decide." And then I just kind of left. That's just one particular instance of a particular student who just goes out of their way to be disrespectful towards me even though I've had interventions with her and stuff like that. I've had a meeting with her and a vice principal talking with her about her behavior, but she doesn't seem to want to change.

Me: With students like that, what prompts that behavior?

D: What do I think causes the behavior? Is that what you said? Sorry.

Me: Yeah.

D: I don't know. I think she is kind of a sassy girl. One of the other teachers on the team knows her from middle school. She's told me that she's always been like that. It's maybe just her personality. I also think that she purposefully likes to act ditsy. To get attention, maybe from the guys. But really, she's very smart and when she does her work, she does an excellent job. Sometimes I think she's kind of bored and is just looking for entertainment or something like that. But I think it's all putting on a show for other students more than anything.

Me: Okay. Yeah, one of those who is just too smart for their own good.

D: Yeah.

Me: Part of my thesis is going to kind of focus on teaching as a female profession—actually, this is something you mentioned last time we talked. I finished this book recently about how the history of teaching leads up to this level of disrespect that we're at now because there are so many women involved. It's kind of a gender type of disrespect. Teaching is seen as feminine, so it's lesser. So I want to focus on that in our conversation a little bit, but any of these questions that you don't want to answer or you don't think you can answer, that's fine. Just tell me.

D: Okay.

Me: First of all, why do you think teaching is considered a woman's profession?

D: I think because, like you said, of the history of it. It's always been kind of close to childcare, a woman's role. That's how it's been viewed in our society. It takes many years for that to change. When our country was first beginning and education was starting as it is now, in the classroom it was totally female and you had rules like women teachers couldn't be married, really archaic rules like that. It starts

there. I work at a school where we're lucky to have a pretty even amount of men and women. I think that it could only come into play now in a school that is primarily female, and it's not an even or diverse representation of both being leaders and role models.

Me: So overwhelmingly throughout the history of teaching as we know it, men have used teaching as a stepping stone to a different career. They teach before they go practice law or they teach and then go write or whatever. Do you still see that happening or do you see more men entering the profession because they definitely want to?
D: I don't know. I can't speak broadly, but I can maybe speak from one example. I know that there's a male teacher who worked at our school. His wife and he are both teachers. He quit teaching because he needed to make more money because they have a child. I think that definitely happens. I don't necessarily view that to be the case now overall. I think women also do the same thing. Women start teaching and then move on to other careers. But also vice versa. I know lots of teachers who are teaching as a second career. I know one teacher in particular, she teaches computers and a business class and that's what she did as a career. She decided to start teaching to have more time for her family and for her kids.

Me: Do you think men make good teachers?

D: Yes. Sure.

Me: Okay. How many male teachers—and you might not know the exact number, but just generally—how many of the male teachers at your school are NOT also coaches?

D: A large number. I don't know how many teachers are at my school. Is that bad? I mean, you were there so you might have a rough number of about how many teachers work at [redacted-urban school].

Me: I actually don't know.

D: I don't know. Maybe….

Me: I would guess maybe 100 or a little more than that. Is that too few?

D: Yeah. I think so too.

Me: I think that's right.

D: And now we have slightly less because 20 teachers had to be let go because of all of the budget stuff that went on. I think that there are just slightly less males in my particular school. It's a pretty even amount. There are definitely more females, but not by a huge percentage.

Me: Do you have many female coaches at your school? I know that [redacted] is a coach of something. And she's the athletic director? Is that right? She coaches tennis maybe?

D: Yeah. Oh my gosh, I can't remember her name right now. But there's definitely more than one female coach. I think there are probably more male coaches though.

Me: Do you think that young women in particular benefit from having male teachers? Not over female teachers, just in general.

D: Sorry, say that last part again.

Me: I meant, they don't benefit from having male teachers more than female teachers. Do you think it benefits them to have male teachers?

D: I think so. Especially in an inner city school where you have a lot of students who have broken home lives. You have a lot of students who live with grandparents or single mothers. So it's good to have a male teacher that's a role model and that's someone who can be a role model. I don't know how else to describe it.

Me: You would say the same of young men who have male teachers?

D: Yeah. I think so.

Me: Okay, so here is the doozy question. Compare yourself to your closest male counterpart. Can you think of who that would be? You don't have to say their name.

D: I think so. Do you mean another teacher or just in life?

Me: Another teacher.

D: Okay, okay.

Me: Are you a better teacher than he is?

D: Well, I'm thinking in particular of one teacher who is across the hall from me. It's his first year—he teaches the same thing as me, ELL students—I would say that I have more experience than him. Therefore, I might have more tricks up my sleeve, but I would not say that I'm a better teacher than him.

Me: Okay. This is the last question in this line of questioning. Do you think men in teaching are treated the same as women?

D: I think that life is imperfect. There are always going to be biases based on all kinds of things, gender included. I think students react to male teachers differently. I

think they often maybe innately respect men more, at least at first. But I think that, based on the teaching style and their personality in the classroom, that gender doesn't matter as much anymore as a person. But definitely like we were talking in the last interview, when you asked me a question about being a female and being petite and being a blonde girl, I think that does make a difference. I put in my journal something about that because I had a student say to me, "Why are you so tiny?" Sometimes they say things like that. I had another student say, "Students just talk over you in this class because you're so small." I don't view myself as any different than any male teacher, but that does make a difference. Even though it shouldn't, it does.

Me: Why do you think so many people in the public feel so invested and opinionated about the direction public schooling should be going?

D: I think people in the public always have opinions about things that they don't really know about. I think that people think they know especially because they have gone to school. Their views and their outlooks are shaped by their experiences, especially in places like Oklahoma. We know that our education system has been at the bottom of the barrel as far as performance goes. [Talking outside of the phone call] I'm sorry. I'm talking while I'm driving. There's construction. Sorry, what was I saying?

Me: I think the last thing you said was that education in Oklahoma is kind of perceived as at the bottom of the barrel.

D: Yeah, so if people have had a negative experience themselves or didn't have fun in high school or were just getting thrown a bunch of worksheets, and not being taught in the correct way, or had a really valuable experience where they were prepared to go to college, then they're going to have a more negative view of education, even if they're maybe biased.

Me: Tell me about your ideal school. If you could tear down public education and create it how you want to, what does it look like? What are students learning? How are they learning? All that kind of stuff.

D: My ideal school, in a dream or alternate reality, would be… This is a hard question. It would be cool if it were, in some ways, like other countries that I know value education more. Sometimes they have systems in place, for example like a teacher having a group of students and following them and staying with them for many years. I don't know if that would be a good thing, but it sounds interesting to me. Changing the structure like that and more creativity, like letting students choose their path and have more freedom and more interesting classes. At the school where I work, we just have the basic core classes and the basic electives, like art and P.E. and computers, but in some high schools they have more interesting electives that sound more like college electives, like an English class that's only about "Good versus Evil" or some other interesting topic. I would, in a perfect school, see more

of that. Classes where students choose where they want to go. They would still be learning all the same basic skills, but in a framework that's more creative. What else?

Me: How involved is the community in your dream school?

D: What is the involvement of the community?

Me: Yeah.

D: More community involvement would be so cool. I guess I kind of have mixed views on things like charter schools, where maybe the community is more involved and directly affects the school. Because, as great as that is for the charter school, it might take away or hinder the public schools that are at play. But, I guess, if that was all there was…I don't know. I don't know if that would make sense or work. But definitely a greater involvement of the community. It would be so cool if we could have tutors that come in from the community, if we could have professionals or people who could receive some training to be some tutors and mentors that are not necessarily teachers at the school.

Me: That would be really great. And I think it would get kids excited for the things that they could be doing. They hear about…we kind of have this push for everybody to go to college, but really not everybody does need to go to college. I think if they saw professionals in the community that maybe didn't go to college or who live a life closer to their own, they might see their potential a little bit. I'm so sorry. There are people screaming outside of my house. I think they've lost their dog or something. I don't know what they're freaking doing. I've got to go….Hold on one second.

D: No problem.

Me: So I live back off the main street behind another house, and this person is just walking through my yard screaming. She's walked like 50 or 75 feet off the road to yell for her dog in my yard. Like, "What are you doing? Your dog's not back here. Go away." Sorry.

D: It's ok.

Me: Anything else about your ideal school?

D: Not that I can think of right now unless you have a specific question about it.

Me: Oh no. I just wanted to jump back in because I think I cut you off about it.

D: Sure. No, it's okay. There's probably much more, I just can't think of everything that would be ideal.

Me: No, I mean…You did…That was great. If you could talk to all parents and students in the state of Oklahoma, what would you say to them to encourage them to be more respectful toward teachers?

D: That's a hard question. What would I say to them to encourage them to be more respectful to teachers? I don't know. What could you say? I mean, I feel like it should be something that's taught at home. I feel like parents should be teaching their children how you treat others and how you treat adults and authority figures. I think at my school, that's one of the big problems. I don't think teacher respect is a huge problem over our entire state. I think it's the biggest problem in these inner city schools where many of the students do come from broken homes. They don't have that model of what respect should look like to emulate that and to act that way in class and to the adults they see at school. I would give just regular parental tips in general about what is important, what kind of values are important to instill in your children, and how you go about that; how you be a respectful person, a respectful human, and someone that has civic responsibility as well.

Me: So do you have anything you do in your classroom to set up expectations of respect?

D: Well, I definitely have my classroom rules. This year, I feel like this year has been hard for me classroom management-wise. In the beginning, in my particular classroom—I might have told you about this last time; I don't remember—I had a lot of movement in between classes. I always feel like I have to start over with my group, especially the 6th and 7th hours that give me a hard time. They really need to be in a seating chart, and that's one big classroom management thing, but they're really not. It's one major, major disrespectful thing I've encountered during this year more than anything is that a large number of students basically refuse to get up, and "please, move into your assigned seat." It's a constant battle. You know, I don't want to spend ten minutes at the beginning of every class making sure they're in the seating chart. It's something that I'm right now thinking about and how I need to address these two particular hours that are so horrible and take that extra time to make them follow some of these procedural things. "If you're going to talk, then you're just not going to have your friend next to you that you want to talk to." But I try in my classroom to mostly, and sometimes it's really hard to do, but I try to focus on the praise, verbal praise, loud, for everyone to hear, often. "Good job," and "Oh wow. I like what you did," versus picking out the negative things: "Johnny, don't do this. Johnny, what are you doing?" Doing that quieter, directly and quieter, and having the praise—what I like to see—as the forefront is one thing that I try to do. I think that helps with respect. It's just sometimes difficult to remember do that when you have that student who's clearly not following directions and being disrespectful; all you want to do is just fix it. I think that I try to start to form relationships with students by talking to them individually if they come in with a question, "How was your weekend?" Asking them questions about what they like to do or what they're favorite subject is. I think that that helps with respect too,

especially when they view you as a real person. I said something about that in my journal entry, I think. So those would be some of the things I do.

Me: Okay, great. What is the biggest way that any group of people—students or parents or the public—can so that they respect you or teachers in general? And you can split this up, if you want to, between the groups.

D: I think, obviously, on the regular classroom level, simply following directions and not talking over a teacher is huge. But also just being polite. Saying "please" and "thank you" and looking you in the eye when they talk to you. And going out of their way to come up to you at the appropriate time, to not say "Hey, miss. Can I come see my grade?" when you're right in the middle of talking. Waiting until after class is over to as, "Hey, can I see my grade?" I think that—I don't know if this is really respect—but I really like it when students from past years come up to me. It shows me that they do respect me as a teacher when they want to come and talk to me. Not come and interrupt my class or anything like that, but come during lunch to say hello. That just shows me that we did kind of have a bond, and they respect me as a teacher. They'll ask me, "How is your year going with your students? Are they being good to you? If they're mean to you, I'm going to come in and yell at them." Stuff like that, and that's fun to realize that you have those special relationships with past students.

Me: So what is one thing you would never tell anyone about teaching?

D: Yeah, I saw that question and was like, "I don't know." I don't know. Can you give me like some kind of direction or like… What do you mean? I don't think that there's anything I wouldn't tell. I think. Like something that I've done as a teacher? Or just in general about the profession of teaching? I don't think that I'm the type of person who would refrain from disclosing information that maybe isn't even that flattering to me or to education in general. But I don't know if I can think of something right now unless you give me some kind of hint or direction of how to answer it.

Me: Ok, so when I wrote this question, I had just finished interviewing a teacher who I had forever ago. She was my 5th grade teacher. Her grandson, who I know a little bit, is planning on becoming an English teacher. She talked to me forever about how she did not want that to happen, but she didn't want to tell him. So, just kind of…I've been noticing, we as teachers don't want to say that our profession has its crappy points, but there are things about it that, if you were trying to attract someone to teaching, you wouldn't want to say.

D: Right. Yeah, yeah. I get what you're saying now. It's funny because, for most of my students… I've had some students last year, when we talked about careers, who were interested in being teachers. They asked me, "Do you like being a teacher?" And I was able to say, "Here are some of the good points and some of the bad points." Even though I am a teacher and I respect teachers and I think being in

education is a really commendable thing, I personally don't view teaching as an ideal, awesome, really respectable career. Pretty much anybody who wants to be a teacher, unless you're a complete idiot, can get your degree in Education and be a teacher. Like they say, those who don't do, teach. That might be offensive to some teachers, but I'm not that offended by it. I kind of think it's true. So I would kind of understand what that other teacher was saying by not wanting that to happen as far as their…what is grandson?

Me: Yeah.

D: Because I would at least like for my students or even my son or my husband, I would want more for them than being a teacher. I think that there's more out there that's cool. And I don't necessarily plan…I don't know if I'm going to be a teacher forever. I want to probably get my PhD, likely in Education, and do something above and beyond the classroom that's within Education.

Me: Okay. Good answer. Sorry for the confusing questions. Sometimes the things in my brain don't translate.

D: It was a nice, broad question, because you want a good answer that's not too leading. I get it.

Me: How do you feel about teachers on social media? Do you think it has an impact on how the public perceives us?

D: How the public perceives teachers through social media?

Me: Yeah.

D: It's hard for me to answer that question because I'm anti-social media. I'm not on any social media; I don't have Facebook. I think that if a teacher is ranting or if a teacher is…I don't know…a total idiot and is posting crazy stuff up there, then that might be negative. I think sometimes news stories that are controversial get passed around more. There have been plenty of scandals where allegations of sexual harassment or sexual encounters between students and teachers, which makes teachers look really bad. That kind of thing. I think that in social media in general, a magnifying glass is put on the more negative things. I'd hope that there are lots of positive stories out there too, but I think it's kind of human nature to want to read about the gossipy kind of things. In that way, it might paint a negative picture.

Me: Sure. You're full of great answers today. You must have had a really good day.

D: Thanks. I feel like I'm more on top of it than last time.

Me: Do you experience any kind of double standard when dealing with your private life and your job?

D: A double standard…So like, I'm married, so as far as my husband and I go when talking about our careers and things like that?

Me: That will work. Well, so, I guess for instance, going back to the social media thing, my mom has had some battles with disgruntled—my mom has been a teacher for almost twenty years—and she's had some with disgruntled parents who go and stalk her Facebook and then try to get her in trouble for things. Sometimes, because we are such public figures, we can't just live our lives. Have you experienced anything like that?

D: Like I said, I stay away from social media, so that helps. So, no, I haven't really experienced that myself.

Me: Do you think the expectation of professionalism in the teaching profession has undermined the relationships that teachers can build with their students?

D: I don't think so. So, by the way you're asking that question, are you insinuating that as the profession has gotten more professional, teachers are expected to be more of a professional learning community instead of a more traditional classroom feel?

Me: Yeah.

D: Yeah, and I that good educators and professional educators know that it's important to form relationships with students. I think that it's interesting, and kind of tricky in a way. Although teachers should be forming strong relationships with students, they should be forming teacher-student relationships, which isn't a real relationship. It is a relationship, but it's not a friendship. It's not even mother-son or mother-daughter relationships. It's professional in nature. I don't think that should hinder it.

Me: If we designed schools, more like communities, with teachers in more of a mentor and kind of friendship role, do you think students would be more respectful toward their teachers?

D: Yes. I think so, because I think students often forget that that person standing in front of you and trying to teach you is a real person. They have a real life with real experiences, values, goals. Sometimes when you tell students something about yourself, they're so shocked. They can't believe it, like "Really?" I'm like, "Yeah. I'm a human person just like you guys. I'm a teacher, but I'm a person, too." I think that that would be awesome, if it could be more like that. Can I…I'm sorry to have to do this, but can I please hang up? My husband keeps calling me. Can I call you right back?

Me: Yeah. Absolutely.

D: Okay. Alright.

Me: No problem.

[Pause]

Me: Okay. We can just pick up where we were.

D: Okay.

Me: So how do you gauge the professionalism of the teachers that you work or interact with?

D: Sure. Maybe it's not a conscious effort, but maybe subconsciously I rank them in that way.

Me: Do you think they are all fairly professional or do you think they need a little help?

D: I think that at my school, I wouldn't say that there are any individual teachers who are totally unprofessional. But I think it definitely varies, and I think everyone has those moments at times where you think, "Woah. That was kind of an unprofessional thing to do," even for people like the principal. I think that it varies across teams, too. For example, the English team—English 10—has always been, in the past especially, very test driven. I think that has created this environment, like you know because you've been in the PLC with us last year, that is very serious and very goal-oriented. That's still the way it is this year, because we have a lot of the same team members and we always have our agenda and we're expected to be at our meetings on time and be contributing, but even this year—from last year—there's a difference. I think that the personalities in the room can kind of change that feeling. We maybe have some more personalities in the room that are a bit more relaxed and make more jokes. I don't view that as a bad thing, but it kind of changes the environment and how professional it feels. One unprofessional thing that I've really noticed this year was the emails. Certain emails that went on that were to the whole school, that necessarily shouldn't have been to the whole school. One thing that happened was the principal kind of reprimanded a teacher, saying "This is not an appropriate email to send out to the entire school." And yet, he did that as a reply-all to the entire school. That just looks so bad, like he was talking down to this teacher in front of everybody, and kind of being a hypocrite by doing exactly what he just told her not to do. Little things like that, I view as unprofessional, but there's nothing huge and glaring that I've noticed in our school that's, thankfully, been very bad.

Me: Okay. So I've gotten a comment or two on my online survey about teacher dress, modern teacher dress. It has changed. Teachers, when I went to school and I'm sure when you went to school too, wore slacks and wore closed-toed shoes and

wore nice tops, and now it's kind of more relaxed. Do you feel like it's a positive thing or it's a negative thing or does it have any effect on how teachers are perceived?

D: I think it could be both positive and negative. I think that, if teachers look more casual, they should still look appropriate. That's one thing. I think that students do make strong judgements of teachers based on their dress. Sometimes a neutral, professional look is great and can kind of establishes that presence of them being the adult in the room and being a professional. But sometimes, like this year I've noticed, I like to dress cute. Sometimes I, like this year, I just wore a lot of dresses and stuff. But I kind of stopped, because I thought that being too cute, even though it was professional…well not exactly professional, but dressed-up-looking dresses which were appropriate and accepted for teacher to wear…the students would kind of look at me and think like, "Oh, look at her. She's so fancy and so prissy" or something like that. I think that can kind of backfire. They can have a negative view of the teacher for that reason, instead of being very relaxed and casual.

Me: I hate to drag [redacted-teacher's name] under the bus, but the way that she would dress in the classroom…when I first met her, I thought, "There's no way. I can't…I'm not going to dress like that. I'm not going to wear jeans and flip flops every day. That's not professional."

D: Yeah. She does. She wears flip flops.

Me: But then I realized that I was causing a problem because our kids…they wouldn't…they didn't respect her. They respected me because I dressed nicely and I was their student teacher and I was fun or whatever. So I kind of shifted how I dressed to kind of match her dress, that way we felt more like equals and I wasn't overly…I don't know. That's something that I've noticed: when you're working closely with people, especially strong personalities, it's difficult to try to put on this mask of professionalism, I guess, especially…I don't know. I was…I'm closer to the age of our kids and so I wanted to dress like an adult person, but I just couldn't. I don't know. It made me feel like I was less of a professional. But that's okay.

D: Yeah. I get what you mean. It's funny too because the students all just respected you and did a lot of listening, because all the boys just had crushes on you. And after you left, [redacted-teacher's name] said something like, "You guys, this semester is different. Why aren't you working as hard?" Some girl said, "Because Ms. Montgomery is gone."

Me: They didn't like her. And the thing was…

D: "That's why none of the boys work anymore." She was like, "What are you guys trying to say about me?"

Me: The thing was…she handed the classroom over to me pretty quickly. I was teaching and planning and grading. I graded every single that came across the desk all semester.
D: Oh my…oh.

Me: I know. Every single thing.

D: Yeah. That's a bit much.

Me: And so I had more than three weeks where I planned every single thing and I taught every single lesson, and she sat at her desk and colored. She didn't establish that kind of presence with the kids that I did, because I was their teacher, you know. I think…I worried about that when I left, because they were just like…we…you know… "Why is she…" They would say things to me like, "I can't believe she is just sitting over there coloring. You have to do everything. Why doesn't she do anything?" And I'm like, "Guys, I know."

D: That's not fair. Yeah.

Me: It was kind of…anyway…I'll take that part out of my thing. So I just have a couple of questions left for you, and I think we're going to be ending right on time. If it's okay with you, I'm going to read a couple of quotes that I've gotten from some people, and just kind of get your responses.

D: Sure.

Me: The first one is: "I feel like teachers receive respect from those who are willing and want to learn and better themselves. Those that don't care about learning, don't respect teachers. Very similar to law enforcement. Those who obey the laws, respect the police. Those who don't, don't." What do you think about that?

D: Yeah. I think that's spot-on. I am respected by students who want to be there. If they don't want to be there, then [inaudible]. If they don't want to listen to you and do as you're asking or follow the rules because they don't want to be in school, then they display disruptive behavior and yeah. That makes perfect sense.

Me: Okay. Here's the next one: "I think that having the mindset of wanting to continue to improve something, that is kind of something I've taken on myself. It's something that comes internally, and I think, if you're not fully invested, then when it gets rough, you're going to want to find a different career, a different avenue to explore. I think that also being in a school where the students really need good teachers and there isn't a high retention rate, you feel the responsibility to want to keep going, because if you quit, you're part of the same problem and the same cycle. So realizing that…"

D: Absolutely. I'm sorry.

Me: You can respond. I'll stop reading it.

D: No, I'm sorry to cut you off. But, yeah. Everything that person is saying is exactly how I feel. I've been hinting in this interview that I've wanted to do something else, maybe within education, but I feel that exact sentiment where, "I have to spend a few more years teaching first because I have to be a better teacher. I have to finish my duty." Being there and becoming a master teacher isn't for me. It's for the students I'm serving. So I agree with that.

Me: That was you from our first interview. That's why you agree with it. It was you.

D: Oh!

Me: Okay. So here is the last one: "It's about the kids. It's always the kids. I know that what I do every day does matter. Even though my paycheck says it doesn't and the TV says it doesn't. It really does. When you look at a kid who needs you, that matters. And that's why I need to keep my focus and not let the rest of this suck all the joy out of it. It's a really fun job once the classroom door is closed."

D: Uh huh.

Me: What do you think about that one?

D: Can you please repeat that one?

Me: She says, "It's about the kids. It's always the kids. I know that what I do every day does matter. Even though my paycheck says it doesn't and the TV says it doesn't. It really does. When you look at a kid who needs you, that matters. And that's why I need to keep my focus and not let the rest of this suck all the joy out of it. It's a really fun job once the classroom door is closed."

D: Yeah. I would agree with that. But it's hard to keep that in mind, especially when you have a large population of students. I think it's frustrating and discouraging when you feel like you're not doing that. And I think that's something that comes with experience, like the quote from me about bettering yourself as an educator, because I don't think that kind of feeling of success and like, "Oh, once you close the classroom door everything is good and wonderful" comes naturally or perfect all the time. But yeah, I get what they're saying. Pretty much, that's why people go into teaching.

Me: Okay. I've got two more questions for you.

D: Okay.

Me: After considering the topic of teacher respect over the past couple of weeks, what do you think teachers can do to gain more respect in this state?

D: I think by regaining a positive voice and pushing the issues that teachers are passionate about. And giving real examples of their experiences and voicing problems and concerns. That's all we can do. That and just continuing to teach to the best of our ability and being role models in our community. What else can we do?

Me: Yeah. I think you're right. I really do. So your last question is: what would you like your pseudonym to be in my thesis paper?

D: My pseudonym. I don't know. Suzanne! I don't know.

Me: Suzanne.

D: Is it just like a random name?

Me: Yeah. Just whatever.

D: Yeah. I don't care. I don't know.

Me: Okay. Alright. Let me stop this recording.

Ms. Allison: Interview 1 (modified transcript)

Me: So let's just jump right into it so I don't take up too much of your time. Do you mind telling me first a little bit about your career so far?

Ms. Allison: Okay. Let's see. I graduated with my teaching degree in 1990, and I taught one year in [redacted-rural] Oklahoma. It was so awful that I quit for six years. And then I taught at a private school for one year, [redacted-urban] High School for one year, [redacted-urban] High School for five years. And then I taught in Virginia for a year, and now I've been at [redacted-suburban] for twelve.

Me: Wow. Okay. So you have a broad spectrum of opinion. That's great. I'm glad.

A: I've been around the block, as they say.

Me: Well good. I mean good for my purposes. Maybe not so good for you.

A: I liked it.

Me: Yeah, got some variety. So my first question is kind of basic, but I just want to check in and gauge how respected you feel in your specific school, and then I'll ask you again in your district, and then in the state as a whole. So let's start with school, your specific school.

A: Okay. So you want to know how respected I feel there?

Me: Yeah.

A: Okay. With the kids and he parents, I don't have any problems at all. I feel like they all think that I'm doing a good job. The administration, and I know they're doing it just because they have to, but with all the meetings and interruptions and all that I don't feel very professionally treated most of the time.

Me: So what about within your district as a whole? So you're in…?

A: [redacted]

Me: [redacted] district, okay. I don't really know much about that district.

A: I don't know. I think our superintendent is very respectful of my profession. I don't always feel that way about some of the support staff. I'm never sure what they do. I have no idea what their job is.

Me: So how big is [redacted] district? Is it comparable in size to Moore or….?

A: Yeah, we have about 14,000 in our district. There's 1,000 in our school.

Me: Okay, and so how do you feel as far as whether or not you're respected within the state?

A: Not at all.

Me: That's most people's thought about that. Who do you feel disrespected by as far as this state goes? Just the general public or lawmakers?

A: No, I think it's the legislators a lot. The media definitely. They're always looking to bark about something wrong.

Me: Can you remember the last time you heard a positive story about Oklahoma teachers?

A: Hmmm. No.

Me: I can't either.

A: It's always, "This teacher has been arrested" or "Teacher pay is bad" or "They're all leaving" or whatever.

Me: Our state attrition rate, which you might know this, it's getting close to 15%. And that's not counting new graduates who are leaving; that's only counting teachers who have started teaching in Oklahoma and then have left. So what…I know you've bounced around to a couple of states, but what's brought you back to Oklahoma, specifically to teaching in Oklahoma?

A: My family was here. I was a military kid, so it's the only place that's ever felt like home. I almost don't know what to do besides teaching. It's what I've been doing for 22 years. It's not like there's a big call for interpreting poetry anywhere else. It's just what I do. I've invested so much time in it now that it's almost too late to quit.

Me: Do you think, if given the chance, you would quit or you'd stick to it?

A: It depends on the day. There are some days when I think, "Surely there is something else I can do." But I get a lot of encouragement from my family and from students. Some days it's harder to go than others.

Me: You're my suburban district person, and I spent…I mean, I did my student teaching at Grant and then I some long term subbing in Moore, and I think there is a pretty drastic difference in how people perceive their teachers. It seems like to me that people are always under the impression that suburban teachers have it made, they have it better, they have more money. What do you think about that?

A: I don't think that's true at all. The kids are always kids. I've always felt more valued at [redacted-urban] or [redacted-urban]. The kids actually needed me more and the parents were always more appreciative because they knew how much of a difference education was going to make. And I think the privilege that comes in the suburbs can get you entitlement, can get you dissatisfaction. Which I think come out in a disrespectful way. I never had trouble with parents at [redacted-urban] like I do at [redacted-suburban]. I don't think the expectations are necessarily higher, but I think they have that entitlement where they think their kid deserves everything just because they have more money.

Me: So you're saying you actually think it's more difficult in suburban schools?

A: In some ways. I think the adults are more difficult in suburban schools.

Me: This might be more than you're willing to share, but do you mind telling me what kinds of problems that you deal with with parents? You're more than welcome to say no if you don't feel comfortable.

A: I don't have too many problems, but if I do, it's that their AP kid didn't get an A or "Why didn't they get a higher score on this assignment?" They are more concerned about the grade than the actual learning.

Me: It's a lot of teacher-blame for things?

A: Not a lot, but there is some. More than I found in the city.

Me: Okay. Can you tell me about a time when you felt most valued as an educator?

A: Uhhh.

Me: That's a hard one.

A: Yeah because there are so many, but it always comes from the kids. When they finally get it or they graduate from veterinary school or they contact me from college to tell me that "I'm glad you taught me this" or "You really helped me in this way." And that always comes from the kids.

Me: And can you tell me about a time that you felt least valued as an educator? Or just kind of a general feeling.

A: I think when I have to go to inane meetings that are supposed to be about professional development, but really just filling in a blank somewhere or doing it because they have to have a meeting. I often feel that way when evaluations come, and they're looking for a certain poster on the wall or something on the board instead of what I'm actually doing.

Me: Do you feel maybe like….oh, how do I phrase this so that it makes sense? Do you feel like things have shifted away from teaching being valued based on their own knowledge and how they teach and toward teaching being valued based on how well they can babysit? Or is that extreme?

A: I definitely feel it's going away from just trusting me. I've very well-educated, I have tons of experience, and yet they're mandating these silly little rules. It's like I don't know what I'm doing. It used to be, I feel like, if the teacher wrote the test, they'd say, "Oh, you wrote the test. This must be a good test. You know what you're doing, and I trust you." But now I don't feel trusted. I don't feel that value I used to.

Me: Why do you think administrators or the powers that be are so mistrustful of teachers?

A: I don't know if they are exactly mistrustful, but we got into that whole running-the-school-as-a-business thing and looking at the bottom line. Which doesn't work because kids aren't a business. And they got into the whole testing thing. If the kids aren't passing, then the teacher's in trouble, instead of focusing on is this kid successful and has he made progress? They keep looking for some mathematical equation of a person and it doesn't work that way. I think when you stop seeing kids as people, you stop seeing their teachers as people, too.

Me: I think you've pretty much answered my next question, which was: where do you feel the most disrespect coming from? But I think you've summed it up as these people who are enforcing this terrible system of rating things on test scores. You've maybe answered this next one too, but I want to ask you more directly: since you have so much experience teaching, have you seen the level of respect given to teachers change in these different groups, like parents and students and administrators? I'm sure in the legislator group is has, but what about within the schools themselves?

A: I think they're so distracted by the paperwork and filling in all of the blanks and jumping through all of the hoops and stuff, that it gets too be depersonalized. I don't think administrators are purposefully trying to depersonalize it, but it trickles down to where they have to do this to keep their job. It used to be when I was evaluated we would talk about individual students, like "Look how far this one has come." But now it's just a checklist of things I'm supposed to show them. I don't think their attitudes have changeD as much as their job requirements have, and it's taken them away from the things that they feel are really important too.

Me: Do you still see administrators walking the hallways and engaging with students or has that kind of gone out the window?

A: We see it at the beginning of school, but the more we get into the school year, the less I see it. They're so caught up in all of the meetings they have to do and all of the other junk they have to do, they just run out of time.

Me: Yeah, I can definitely see that.

A: I mean, the last two weeks, we've seen them a lot, but in January, you won't seem them nearly as much.

Me: As far as, the lawmakers who perhaps don't have as much experience in education as we'd like, do you think it's mostly our fault as a public or do you think there are other interests at work?

A: Oh, I think there are. It's all a money machine really. It comes down to Pearson makes a ton of money on testing and test prep, and the more they can sell that to legislators as a good thing and the more they buy it, the more it perpetuates itself. I've worked for Pearson scoring some of their stuff before, and they're just making tons of money selling all of this stuff. Everyone, all of the legislators think, "What a good idea!" They're being sold that it's really great for kids, but they don't know the difference. They don't know what's good for kids.

Me: I was so happy to see that there were so many educators up for election this current term. I was really excited about that.

A: Someone who's actually been there, that would be nice.

Me: Yeah. That would be great. Someone who wasn't a dentist would be cool.

A: Literally anybody who wasn't a dentist.

Me: Would you ever run for office?

A: No.

Me: No?

A: The last thing I ever want to do is be on TV.

Me: I heard you mention earlier stuff about the media giving teachers a bad rap. Do you think that has a significant influence on the way the public, people who are not tied to education perceive teachers? Or do you think that comes from their own experiences in school?

A: No. I think, overall, people's experience in school is pretty good. We can all talk about a teacher who helped or a teacher we loved. Of course, there's always a bad one in there somewhere; but it's the good one who sticks with you. I think parents

appreciate us. I tell my students that only the freaks get on TV, and we have to remember that that is the aberration from the norm and not the norm. But it's hard when they just keep pounding us with the bad news.

Me: So here is a big question: what can Oklahoma teachers do to improve our pretty dire outlook?

A: I really have no idea. Most days, I just keep my head down and do my job and enjoy the kids. I just close the classroom door, and I try not to worry about the rest of it. It's too big a problem, and I haven't a clue how to fix it.

Me: I think that's how lots of teachers are feeling lately. It's too exhausting to even think about it.

A: It adds to the disrespect because there's nothing I can do. I'm totally powerless. I'm at the mercy of the winds of the legislature.

Me: So in your mind, what would be the best case scenario for teachers within the next five years? What would that look like?

A: I wouldn't do this…I've never done this for the money part. You go into education knowing that upfront. But just trusting my own judgement and stop handcuffing me from doing what I want to do. Leave me alone with the testing and the silly requirements. And they've started to do that. They've cancelled some of the EOI testing. Just use some common sense, and let me do my job without so much nonsense. I'm chair of my department, and I see teachers, when it comes time for EOIs, they're just a wreck. And that's not good for the kids.

Me: It's not good for anybody.

A: Yeah. I get so frustrated because they're all so young and frustrated, and it just beats them up.

Me: Do you deal with a lot of teachers who get sick because they're so stressed out or on the verge of mental breakdowns? Or has everybody learned to cope?

A: I had one last year, but she didn't at our school. She moved on.

Me: To a different school or a different career?

A: She actually moved up to administration. I don't know if that's trying to get power over her own situation or just what. But she was making herself sick over testing last year. I think I finally got the rest of them kind of calmed down.

Me: Did you notice a difference between states? You said you taught in…

A: Virginia.

Me: In Virginia. Did you notice a big difference or our they pretty similar to Oklahoma as far as testing and pay?

A: It felt a lot different to me because it was teachers making some of the policy for the district. We got together and figured it out. They gave me planning time for that. Of course, the pay was much, much higher there, so there were fewer worries about that. It seemed different to me that I was more involved in making the decisions for the district rather than the district making them for me.

Me: I think, just going off my encounters with teachers and this online survey that I've launched recently, teacher pay is certainly a significant worry for a lot of teachers, especially single moms or teachers who are kind of the breadwinners in their family. It is just soul-crushing to read some of the things these teachers have written to me. They say things like, "I can't even teach how I know I can teach because I'm worrying about how I'm going to feed my own kids at night." And it's just devastating. And it leaves me feeling like, what do we do here?

A: And I did that too. For about half of my career, I was a single mom. We were getting free food from churches, and my kids were on Free Lunch. That seems absurd to me. I don't know how we did it.

Me: That, to me, is possibly the most disrespectful part of all of this. Because anybody can deal with the bureaucracy part…

A: They go together.

Me: Yeah, but just knowing that you've…

A: They've spent so much money on this testing and everything else. It all comes down to the money, where it goes and who gets it first.

Me: Yes. It's been very exhausting. I didn't quite know what I was getting into when I started this. I should have done something happier.

A: It used to be when kids would tell me that they wanted to be a teacher, I was so proud of them. But now, so few of them ever say that, but when they do, I want to almost discourage them; "Don't do that. It'll hurt you too much." I don't want that, but I also don't want to discourage them because we've got to have somebody. And that's one of the reasons I agreed to do this because, gosh, if you're interested at all, I've got to do my part to help. It's all about the students.

Me: At this point, I'm so invested in just learning everything I can learn about teaching as a whole, not just about how I could teach my own classes, that I don't think I could do anything else. But that is not a popular opinion. I know plenty of

people who I did my undergrad with who were basically in it for the very derogatorily called MRS degree. They were basically waiting until they got married to get out. That makes it worse somehow, that this is a stepping stone.

A: It was the blow-off classes you could take.

Me: Yeah, it's terrible. What advice would you give to new teachers or to people who are considering becoming teachers? I know you don't want to outright discourage them, but do you have any advice?

A: Umm.

Me: Don't do it?

A: It's about the kids. It's always the kids. Know that, what I do every day does matter. Even though my paycheck says it doesn't and the TV says it doesn't, it really does. When you look at a kid who needs you, that matters. And that's why I need to keep my focus, and not let the rest of this suck all of the joy out of it. It's a really fun job once the classroom door is closed.

Me: Okay, I've kept you for almost half an hour. Any last thoughts or words of wisdom for this interview.

A: No. I don't know how wise I am. But…it's all the kids. That's the only thing there is.

Me: Yeah. Alright. Let me turn off this recording device.

Ms. Allison: Interview 2 (modified transcription)

Ms. Allison: I bet you're ready to be finished with this, aren't you?

Me: Oh, I still have a long way to go, unfortunately. Lots of writing still in my future.

A: Oh well.

Me: Yeah. That happens. Do you mind telling me a little bit about the things you've been writing in your journal? How is that going?

A: I really don't have a lot of time to do it. I was writing some yesterday.

Me: That's okay.

A: We had a professional development day today, so I wrote about that.

Me: Okay. That's absolutely fine. Like I said, they didn't have to be anything elaborate. Just your thoughts or whatever. So whenever you're ready to be done with that, you can send it to me and call it good.

A: Do you have an address I can send it to or…?

Me: Um. Yeah.

A: I'm old fashioned.

Me: Sure. You can mail it to me. Absolutely.

A: If you just email me the address, I'll send it to you.

Me: Sure. Absolutely. You're also welcome to just take pictures of it and email it to me if that's easier. But it doesn't matter.

A: Okay.

Me: You can mail it if you want to. I don't mind sending you my address. Have you experienced anything that you perceived as disrespectful this week?

A: This professional development.

Me: Okay, okay. And how do you think that plays into the disrespect of teachers? We talked about it a little bit in your other interview.

A: Well, like today, we talked for an hour or more about things that are almost relevant. And then we played Pictionary for an hour and a half. Then, had lunch.

Me: No way they made you play Pictionary. You've got stuff to do. Ugh. That makes me mad for you.

A: It was supposed to be a team building thing. But when there's so much to do and they're just after me all the time to do all this stuff, it's very frustrating.

Me: I bet. Part of the aim of my thesis is to look at gender and how that could potentially play a factor in why teaching is disrespected as a profession. So I want to skew this interview toward that direction for a little bit. Some of these questions are maybe a little bit personal, so feel free to tell me, "No" if you don't want to answer something.

A: Okay.

Me: Why do you think teaching is considered a woman's profession?

A: Because there is a lot of caregiving involved, a lot of looking after people, a lot of multitasking—men aren't good at that.

Me. Sure. Do you think that seeing teaching as a woman's profession contributes to the lack of respect that teachers receive?

A: I don't think it does anymore. I think it perhaps did in the past. When I first started teaching—I guess it was my second year that I actually taught at a private school—at the end of the year, I told them that I needed to make more money or I couldn't keep doing it. He told me that it was supposed to be a side-job for a woman who didn't need to support her family. That a man should do that, and I didn't need to make more money.

Me: Well okay.

A: Yeah. "Okay. Tell my kids that, but whatever."

Me: Right. Do you think that men make good teachers?

A: Yeah. Sometimes.

Me: Sometimes? Okay.

A: Well, I think it doesn't matter what the gender, not everybody's good at it.

Me: Okay. How many—and you don't have to give me an exact number on this because you might not know—how many male teachers in your school are not also coaches?

A: Maybe three or four. Maybe.

Me: Yeah? Could you estimate how many male teachers there are in you school?

A: We probably have 20.

Me: How does that compare to the number of female teachers?

A: We have 80, all together.

Me: Okay. So overwhelming more female. Do you have any female coaches at your school?

A: Yes.

Me: Okay. And they coach ladies' sports?

A: Yes. You don't see a woman coaching football.

Me: Sure. Do you think it benefits young women to have male teachers?

A: Yes, I do. I don't there are enough men in the house anymore.

Me: And I'm assuming that you'd think the same for young men? That it benefits them also?

A: Absolutely.

Me: Do you think it would benefit the teaching profession as a whole to have more male teachers?

A: No, I don't. Like I said, I think the probably used to be true, but it's not so much anymore.

Me: Do you think that, I mean, teaching is a personality thing or do you think women are just naturally more inclined to it?

A: I think it's that care-giving thing. It's taking care of kids. It's what women do.

Me: Sure. Okay, for this one…this one could be a little bit touchy maybe, but think about who your closest male counterpart would be. You don't have to say their name. Do you have somebody in mind?

A: I'm trying to think. Okay.

Me: Are you a better teacher than he is? Why or why not?

A: I don't think so. I think we're very different. But I don't think one is better than the other. I think that it takes all kinds. It's probably best for kids to have him and me before they leave.

Me: Do you think men are treated the same as women in teaching?

A: No. I think there is actually a lot of favoritism for men among administrators. I know that it's partially because they're coaches.

Me: Yeah.

A: And in Oklahoma, sports are everything.

Me: Sure. Sure. What is your own personal experience with male teachers? Maybe when you went to school or when your kids went to school?

A: I can only remember having one male teacher when I was growing up. I don't even know what grade it was, probably 5th or something. The only reason I remember him is because—it was Science—and I figured out this science thing, and he really praised me in front of the class. Having a man praise me was not something I was really used to. It really made me feel good. I'd never had that. It was pretty cool.

Me: Why do you think so many people, who maybe aren't necessarily tied to schools, feel so invested an opinionated about the direction of public schooling?

A: What kind of people do you mean? Like, people without kids or without...? I'm not following you.

Me: Yeah. Just the general public. People who aren't teachers or who aren't administrators or who don't deal in public ed.

A: Well, we've all been to school. So I think because we had teachers, we know what teachers ought to be. We think we do. Being a student and being a teacher is not the same thing at all, but you don't know that until you've been a teacher.

Me: Sure.

A: I'm not sure that even made sense.

Me: No, I think I got you.

A: Okay.

Me: There's a lot of behind-the-scenes magic at work that students don't see.

A: Yeah. And parents don't really know about. Because all you know is when you were in the classroom.

Me: Right.

A: Teachers often make it look easy. Like there's nothing that they do, but there's a lot.

Me: This question might be a little bit harder, but tell me about your ideal school. If you could just tear it down as we know it and rebuilt it, what would that look like? What are students learning? What does the building look like? Who are the ideal staff? All that kind of stuff?

A: Hmm. That's really hard.

Me: Yeah. I know.

A: I look at the things they do in other countries. I see how learning is geared more toward student interests and they focus on whatever it is they want to do, but they still include…you know…the artist still learns about English and a little bit of Science, but not to the depth that we do not. It's just to show it to them, so it's an option or they can see how it fits together. I think the classroom setting is still important. I think the classes would be a lot smaller. My biggest class has 33 in it.

Me: Holy cow. Oh man.

A: I have three classes over 30.

Me: That's crazy.

A: So they would be a lot smaller, 20 tops. I think they should have fewer subjects during the day. We have a seven period day, and that's just entirely too much for anybody. And it's too closed off. I think it there should be more cross-curricular connections. Everything is too fragmented, and everyone is such a specialist that the kids never see how it fits together. I'd like to do that. I think teachers should be trusted to know what is best for the students, rather than someone telling me what is best for them, what they should focus on, or what books they should read. I should be able to know a kid and find a book that fits for him, rather than someone telling me that I have to teach Hamlet. That doesn't make any sense.

Me: True.

A: I mean, I have a kid who is going to be a mechanic after he graduates. He doesn't need Hamlet. He just doesn't. We have a lot of bureaucracy and a lot of people who, frankly, I don't know what their jobs are, but they make a lot of money at it. Our administration building is full, but I don't know what ¾ of those people do.

Me: Sure. They certainly don't answer phone calls, I'm sure.

A: I don't know. I never call them. I never have anything to do with them. I don't know what they do. I think teachers should be really well-paid. I have an advanced degree and 22 years of experience; to make $41,000 a year is ridiculous.

Me: Mhm. What about the community? Is the community very involved in your ideal school?

A: Absolutely. It really does take a village. If they're not involved, then the kids can't see where they fit and the families can't see where the kids fit. There's more division all the time.

Me: To kind of go back to something you mentioned a minute ago, do you think this idea of the well-rounded education that we have, do you think that actually hurts the amount of learning kids do.

A: Do I think what hurts their learning?

Me: This concept of the "well-rounded" person.

A: I think we're too specialized. I think we're all generically pronounced to be a specialist and no one else can do your job. Scientist forget about beauty. Artists forget about science. It all is supposed to fit together.

Me: So if you could talk to all of the parents and students in the state of Oklahoma, what would you say to them to encourage them to be more respectful to their teachers?

A: See, I don't think parents and students are really the problem. I'd tell them to quit watching the news and posting on social media and go talk to their kid's teacher. Instead of relying on someone else to tell them what's going on, go to the school. Talk to their kid. Put down the phone and talk to your kid.

Me: So if you could…

A: I sound a little bitter.

Me: No, that's okay. If you could address any group about respect, what group would that be and what would you say?

A: The media. I'd tell them to shut up.

Me: Alright.

A: Just right before I answered the phone, there was some breaking news about some teacher at John Marshall being arrested. He was arrested at school. Unless he's a murderer, there's no need for that.

Me: Right.

A: And to have them "live on the scene" and "what it could mean for your child." Well, it probably doesn't mean anything. It's just gossip and something salacious to sell ads.

Me: Right. He's probably getting arrested for tax evasion or something that has nothing to do with teaching.

A: Who knows. It doesn't even matter. I mean, really it affects like maybe 150 kids total out of the whole state, but that's going to be the lead story on the news. I think it makes all of us look at each other with suspicion and blame instead of working together.

Me: I definitely think sometimes the media's coverage of things is just out of control.

A: Yeah. I get very frustrated. And we have these kids who do great things, but you never hear about them and teachers doing great things, and you don't hear about that. You just hear about whatever.

Me: It kind of reminds me when last year students at US Grant had their walk-out. Instead of focusing on, you know, how these budget cuts are affecting students and that's why students were walking out, they were just like, "Oh, what did the teachers say to these students to get them to leave. They were inciting a riot." That was kind of the impression, and that's just not…

A: Yeah. It's all their fault.

Me: It's terrible.

A: And the kids are actually exercising their rights that they've been taught that they have.

Me: Right. Could there be anything more American than that?

A: Yeah. Some teachers should be applauded, “Look, these kids got it.” But they didn’t say that.

Me: Of course not.

A: It’s our own fault because we watch it and we feed into it. We can’t complain about it if we’re doing it too. They wouldn’t do it if we weren’t watching it.

Me: What are some things that you do in your classroom to try to set up the expectation of mutual respect between you and your students?

A: I’m very polite to everybody all the time. That seems like a little thing, but small niceties are gone. I listen to what they have to say instead of just telling them the answer. I rarely answer questions. I always toss them back at them for each other to answer. I try to show them that it’s not just what’s in the story or in the book. It’s how they are in the book and the book is in them. We’re all evil and we’re all good. The commonalities of man is a lot of what literature is about. I try to teach them about character. I think it helps them feel respected because they feel like a person instead of just a student. I’ve never thought about that before.

Me: One thing that I try to do is call my students Sir or Ma’am. That seems so silly, especially because I’m almost their age. But, I don’t know. It just makes me feel a little bit better, a little bit like I’m being respectful.

A: I only do that when I can’t think of their name.

Me: Right. That too. I do a lot of subbing, so the names kind of run together. What are the biggest ways that student or parents or general people in the public show you that you’re respected as a teacher?

A: When they do come to school to talk to me. Our parents are often very concerned about…or interested in what I have to say. I don’t…in our school anyway, we don’t get a lot of, “It’s all your fault. What are you don’t to my kid?” We get, instead, “I’ll deal with this when I get home” or “what’s he really doing?” Our parents really take responsibility for their kid rather than blaming somebody else, which I’m not sure is all that common anymore.

Me: Okay. That’s great. Bouncing off of your comment about parents just now, I recently did an interview with a teacher who I had when I was in about 5th grade, and she has lots of problems with parents. She said something along the lines of, actually I’ll read you a direct quote, “I think one of the problems we have is that students have a lack of respect for their parents, and that goes right into a lack of respect for anybody in authority.” How would you respond to that quote? Is that something that you see and agree with or not?

A: Yeah, I can see that. I don't think it's just a loss of respect for their parents. All of us have lost respect for each other as people. We're looking for someone else to blame for our troubles and our shortcomings. We're looking for someone else to look at so that we're not looked at. I don't know. I don't see a whole lot of personal responsibility for anything. It's always someone else's fault. I think that it's not just disrespect for teachers; it's disrespect for each other in our society. We're just not nice to each other anymore.

Me: Where do you think that comes from?

A: Well, actually, the way I believe, I just think a lot of it is just integration of society. It's just going to happen. I'm a Christian person, and the Bible tells us that it's just going to fall apart until it doesn't anymore. All societies do that. They never last forever. It always breaks down, it ends, and then there will be a new one. It just can't last. They just get comfortable and complacent and it all goes down after that.

Me: Yeah. I think we're even seeing some of this from our leaders in this upcoming presidential election. It's just been crazy.

A: And the debate tonight is just going to be yelling and name-calling because that's all we do anymore. Nobody talks about what's really going on; they're just, "Your hair looks stupid." Whatever.

Me: Yeah. I agree with you.

A: And you can't pinpoint one thing as causing it. People have believed the same things for thousands of years. I'm sure Socrates felt disrespected, too. It's what we believe. I tell the kids, "You make your own reality. It's true if it didn't even happen."

Me: So what is—and I might have to narrow this question down for you a little bit, but I'll ask the broad question first—what is one thing about teaching that you would never tell anyone?

A: It's gotten to where I'll tell a lot more than I used to. I would never tell the students how discouraged I am. It used to be that I wouldn't tell people how lonely it is, but it's becoming more understood that it's an incredibly lonely profession.

Me: I do think that is one thing that nobody tells you when you enter this profession. It's one of the best-guarded secrets of teaching. Once your classroom door is shut, it's on you.

A: It doesn't look lonely because you're with people all the time, but they're not your friends, they're not your peers. It's really your job. And to feel so powerless a lot of the time. I see kids with all kinds of troubles, and there's not a thing I can do about it. I can't fix the education thing. I can't. All I can do is take care of them for

45 minutes. And that powerlessness is something I'm recognizing more and more every day, and it's more and more discouraging all the time. But I'm not sure that's any different than it's ever been. Teachers have always been segregated in some way. We're just allowed to say it now.

Me: Yeah. Just imagine what it would have been like to be one of the first white, female teachers going south after the Civil War, trying to start up Freed Schools and things. That must have been terribly lonely.

A: I've read all of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, where she was just a teen going from house to house staying. You never have any privacy. You're always being looked at and held to this impossible standard, with kids older and bigger than you are. Terrifying.

Me: So how do you feel about teachers on social media? Do you think this has an impact on how the public perceives the teaching profession?

A: I was thinking about that since you left me that list of questions. I've been telling my husband that in some ways, I feel really stifled by it because I'm warned all the time, "Don't put anything on there. Be really careful. Be really careful." So I feel like I can't have an opinion about anything that matters. All I can put on there is…I crochet dolls, and I can post that on my Facebook. And that's about all there is. I'm afraid to say anything because the slightest opinion that somebody disagrees with or if I make a bad joke and somebody doesn't get it and is offended, then I'm in the principal's office the next day. People are just looking for us, for anybody to make a mistake, I think. Some people can get away with that, but I cannot.

Me: I think teachers kind of deal with the same type of double standards as celebrities and other kinds of public figures deal with. Maybe on a smaller scale, but we have our personal lives and are people but we can't live our personal lives really because we'll get into trouble.

A: Yeah. I purposefully live 20 miles from my school. I shop in a different town. I go to church in a different town. I just…I don't…Nobody calls me Ms. [redacted] when I'm not at school because I'm always somewhere else. And really, I should be a part of the community and part of the parents and talking to them and all that, but it's just so dangerous now. I could lose my job tomorrow if I just put a picture of myself in a halter-top on Facebook. Well, nobody wants to see that but… I'm not allowed to have an opinion. I couldn't comment on the debate tonight because somebody might take it the wrong way.

Me: Something that I'm really interested in is kind of this—you know, along these same lines—this ownership that people feel over people who are in the public eye. It's really weird. If you owned a grocery store, you could put whatever you wanted to online and nobody would care, but because you are seen by a bunch of people all day, every day, they have a hand in how you live your life. It's really strange.

A: Yeah. It's kind of like your preacher. There are some things he can't say online either.

Me: True. Yeah, that's exactly…exactly true. So tell me about how you perceive the professionalism of the teachers that you interact with. If you want to.

A: Well, that's just a hard question. I see all of them as doing the best they can. I don't think anybody would intentionally do a bad job or not care about the kids. I'm the department chair, and there's one teacher in our department who's really negative. She has a lot of personal problems. She's really young and hasn't learned how to separate those things. She lets it show too much. But she's not doing it intentionally; I know that. So I think that we really try to be professional, depending on what you think professional means. But again, I don't always get to be a person at school. I have to be a teacher, and that's not the same thing all of the time. But the kids will respect me when I tell them, "I don't feel good today. I'm going to try not to take it out on you," and all that kind of stuff. They appreciate when I tell them the truth. And they understand, but I don't think everybody else does.

Me: Okay. So some comments I've gotten on my online have talked about teachers maybe not being perceived as professionals because of modern teacher dress. I'm sure you've noticed that it's shifted away from slacks and a top, like business-casual dress, into more casual. What do you think about modern teacher dress and do you think it has anything to do with how teachers are perceived as far as if they are professional or if they should be respected?

A: I really don't because our society has become more casual everywhere. There's no such thing as church clothes anymore. You can wear your pajamas to church if you want. I've been to some funerals lately. People wear horrible things to funerals. It's just a leveling of the levels of formality now. They're collapsing. I mean, I can kind of see it, but only from the older generation. I don't think the younger one cares too much. They don't see that. My husband would have a fit about it, but my children, who are in their 30s, don't see it that way. They are more interested in who the teacher is than how the teacher looks. Teachers these days do an awful lot of weird stuff to their bodies. We have teachers with nose rings and tattoos and stuff. I don't think that matters too much in our society. The stuff you see online, compared to that, is pretty…

Me: So going along with this theme of professionalism, and you can kind of define it however you would define it, do you think this idea of teachers…You know, when public schooling first started, it was more like a daycare where young women would teach four or five or six kids and then it transformed into more like what we know as modern public education. Do you think this idea of teachers being professionals has undermined the relationships that teachers can build with their students?

A: Gosh, I don't think so. Actually, I think, now that more education is required…and I think about when the settlers had teachers and stuff, they may have all eight grades in one room and…I don't know if you were a daycare as much because kids would be at home working if they weren't at school. It was always seen as a way to do better. But I think now we know more, so we probably do better. I think, actually, we're probably more professional than we were then. Actually, I know we are. Even just the standards to become a teacher are very difficult. They've even changed since I graduated. They're harder now.

Me: But do you think that maybe this idea of the teacher being a professional, instead of like a mentor, do you think that's undermined the level of respect we can gain from our students?

A: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Me: Okay. Let me phrase it like this: do you think that if we design schools more like communities, and less like businesses, where we had teachers more in the mentor role than in the instructor role, do you think that students would be more respectful toward teachers?

A: Maybe. Because that would necessitate smaller classes and closer relationships with the students and the community.

Me: I mean, I think I see what you were saying before, and that's that now that teachers have more rigorous standards for becoming teachers that they deserve a different level of respect. Did I get that right?

A: Well, yeah. And I think people see us more as professionals than they used to. I think it will probably become more prevalent the more teachers get fed up and the more that quit. Parents and the communities are more likely to see the difference it makes without a good teacher. I think we're going to have to learn what it's like to be without before we learn how good we had it.

Me: Yeah, I think that's true.

A: I think that's true all the time. You don't know how good you have it until it's gone. See, and you keep talking about disrespect from students…but I never feel…I never have any problems with respect from my students. Ever. Any more than you would expect from any teenager. The occasional flare-up, but nothing permanent. I'm not sure that answered the question at all.

Me: Oh, I think it was my fault. If you can't answer it, I probably didn't ask it right. So I guess my next question to you is—and I'm very glad that you don't have problems with respect from students, but I'm sure you're aware that that's not the case for all teachers. Some teachers are very disrespected. What do you do that's

different? Or what's different about your personality that, you know, that causes students to respect you maybe more than people that you work with?

A: I think it's a lot of my personality. I'm just very, very aware that they're people, and I treat them like individual people rather than like my class or a bunch of students. I'm not afraid to be flawed in front of them. I think that earns a lot of respect rather than pretending to be perfect. That comes with age, too. It does for some people. I'm not into power struggles. I've been told that I have a very laid-back personality and there's something about me that's very calming. I can put anybody to sleep in no time. But I've been asked that before. I haven't written a referral in probably ten years.

Me: Wow.

A: I just don't have problems. It's not because I don't see the problems or anything like that. I'm just honest with them and treat them like they're people. But I don't think that's a common thing anymore. I took a trip recently to Ohio, and it surprised me how differently I was treated there. People don't greet each other. They don't hold the doors for each other. And that kind of thing eventually comes to the center of the country. It starts on the edges and comes in. I don't know. We're just not nice to each other anymore, and I'm very nice to them. That doesn't mean I'm easy on them, but I try to understand. We all have limits, and I'm not afraid to show them that I have limits too. It just works.

Me: I think those are very valuable…incredibly valuable comments, especially for younger teachers. I've noticed that some of my peers, when they enter the profession, they have all kinds of problems with students. I think it's just because they haven't learned to let some stuff go. You know? The whole "pick your battles" thing.

A: It comes with age. You learn what's important and what's not important. Last year, it really made me mad—I had this couch thing that some teacher left in my room years ago; I don't know why. I would always get upset whenever someone sat on the couch. And it thought, this year, "That's just kind of dumb. It's not like it matters. If for whatever reason, they want to sit on the couch, just let it go. It's not worth fussing about."

Me: Sure. Man, we just always have to keep working on ourselves, don't we?

A: Yeah, I imagine I'll be perfect in 20 or 30 more years.

Me: So what is one thing that teachers do that is detrimental to the respect that they receive?

A: They try to act like they're perfect and they're the boss of everything, like they're infallible. And that's where you get those power struggles. They don't like

to be told that they've been wrong about something. We get very defensive when we've made a mistake. It makes us mad. I think that's where we lose it.

Me: Yeah. I think you're right. So, for our next couple of questions, if you don't mind, I'm going to read a couple of quotes that I've gotten from my online survey-takers or the other teachers that I've been interviewing. And I kind of just want your responses, your gut reactions to these. There will be three of them.

A: Okay.

Me: The first one is: "I feel like teachers receive respect from those who are willing and want to learn and better themselves. Those that don't care about learning, don't respect teachers. Very similar to law enforcement. Those who obey the laws, respect the police. Those who don't, don't." How do you respond to that?

A: I don't think so. I think it's an individual thing. You kind of get what you put out there, minus what the media takes from you. I think we're all on edge about policemen now because we've seen so many bad things about them. But, I think overall, they're doing the best they can. It's a hard job, and I think teachers are just the same. Kids all want to learn. They want to learn something. Maybe they don't want to learn about English Literature, but they want to learn about something. And if I can respect that desire that they have, instead of being angry that they don't want what I have. That's not the same at all. I understand that some don't care what I think about this, so I have to make it as relevant as I can to them, so that they want to learn, that they are interested in learning a little something about that. Everybody wants to learn something. I've just got to find it.

Me: I thought it was really interesting that this person compared teachers to the police. It just made me wonder…

A: I'm not a cop.

Me: And this is one of my anonymous online people. And it just made me wonder, "What is this person's classroom like if they are a police officer?"

A: And I've seen that. I've seen teacher berate kids for really dumb stuff, you know, "Don't look at me like that or don't whatever." It's just dumb. They're teenagers, for heaven's sake. That's what they're supposed to do.

Me: Right. Sure. So this next quote, just to put it into a little bit of context for you, this is from the teacher that I'm interviewing from an urban school, and she's talking about retention here. She says: "I think that having the mindset of wanting to continue to improve something, that is kind of something I've taken on myself. It's something that comes internally, and I think, if you're not fully invested, then when it gets rough, you're going to want to find a different career, a different avenue to explore. I think that also being in a school where the students really need good

teachers and there isn't a high retention rate, you feel the responsibility to want to keep going, because if you quit, you're part of the same problem and the same cycle." How would you respond to that?

A: I agree entirely. That's one of the reasons I say in Oklahoma. That's one of the reasons I loved teaching in urban schools. They really need you. And there's that nurturing, caregiving part of me that can't give up, that has to take care of people. And working in an office just isn't going to do that for me. I'm going to have to take care of teenagers. And if I don't do it teaching, I'll find another way, but I can't stop. What does that say to them if I give up on them? I can't do that. They're my kids, and I could never give up on my kids, no matter how stupid they were. Sorry, I have kids.

Me: Okay, here's the last quote: "I know that what I do every day does matter. Even though my paycheck says it doesn't and the TV says it doesn't. It really does. When you look at a kid who needs you, that matters. And that's why I need to keep my focus and not let the rest of this suck all the joy out of it. It's a really fun job once the classroom door is closed."

A: Did I say that? Because it sounds like something I would say.

Me: You did.

A: Yeah. Tomorrow is the reason I put up with days like today. Tomorrow, the kids will be back and it will be me and them again. Even though that's really lonely, it's not. I miss them in the summer and I miss them over Christmas and I cry when they graduate. I teach just seniors, so I know when they leave, I'll probably never see them again. I've had them go off to war and play baseball and all kinds of things. And I worry about every one of them. And I would never stop doing this. Every day, I think, "Surely there is something else I can do." And then they come to class, and I know why I do it.

Me: Absolutely. I think that's why all teachers who are worth a darn keep doing it.

A: Yeah. I don't know what else I would do. I really have no idea.

Me: Okay. Two more questions.

A: Okay.

Me: After considering the topic of teacher respect, like you have been over the past couple of weeks, what can teachers do to gain more respect in the state of Oklahoma?

A: I think we need to talk more. We've been very quiet about how important this job is to us, how much we've invested in it—not just emotionally, but educationally and

financially—and how much it really means to us. That this is not a job. It's a calling, a ministry. And, "Your kid matters. Your kid is the most important kid I know." And if we just start saying positive things. We have to yell louder than the TV does, and we have to smile more. I don't think that the negativity is going to help us.

Me: You are so full of good answers today.

A: I'm old.

Me: Okay, so my last question for you, and then we're done. What would you like your pseudonym to be when I write my thesis?

A: My student name?

Me: Your pseudonym.

A: Oh. My pseudonym.

Me: Yeah.

A: When I'm silly, I tell people to call me Trixie, but that seems too flashy somehow. Ummm…Allison.

Me: Allison. That's lovely. Okay. I will absolutely do that for you.

A: That's one of my daughter's names.

Me: Alright. You got it. Let me push pause on this thing really quick.

Ms. Robinson: Interview 1 (Modified Transcript)

Ms. Robinson: Kody, I've got some of my nieces and nephews here, and whenever their mom calls to tell me that she's out front, I'll probably stop talking to you for just a second, long enough to tell them they need to go, okay?

Me: Alright. That's fine with me.

R: Okie doke.

Me: Okay. Let's start out with some stuff to get us set up. Do you feel respected as a professional within your school?

R: Within the school?

Me: Mhm.

R: Within the school, I would say yes. I would say both administration and peers treat me with respect. Most all the teachers feel respected here. Now there are some…under other leadership, there have been some who felt like they weren't respected, but I think most of them do now.

Me: Do you feel like there's a gap between older teachers and younger teachers? Like they see things from different perspectives or they might receive different levels of respect?

R: I'm trying to think, Kody, if I…I don't think I see that being a problem. I don't see there being a lack of respect between younger teachers and the older teachers. Maybe a little bit [inaudible]. Because the younger kids get out of school and, boy, they know how to do it and the best way to do it. Even though it's been taught forever, and we've been through all of the above and then some, their way is the right way. But I don't know if that's disrespect. It's just they think, "Okay, I know this is the way to do it, so let me do it this way."

Me: And so what about your district. I know it's pretty small, but do you feel like because it's a small district, you're more respected?

R: I feel that way. With our smaller district, I feel very much respected by administration and other people in other schools.

Me: And then the big question: what about within the whole state?

R: If you're talking about the teachers and administration in the state, I feel fairly respected by other teachers whenever I'm around them at workshops and stuff. And I feel respected by other in that many times I've been asked to sit on different

committees, like when we were on Core Curriculum, for instance. They wanted my input, and I felt respected that way.

Me: So our state….

R: Yeah, from teachers across the state and administrators across the state, I feel respected.

Me: Okay. Our state attrition rate is at a crazy all-time high. Not counting new graduates that haven't started teaching, we've got 15% of teachers leaving the field or leaving the state. So my question is: what has kept you teaching?

R: To be honest with you, Kody, what's kept me teaching in small-town Oklahoma is that I don't want to have to drive to another city to work or find a job. And I could have done that and found a job that pays a whole lot more than what I get paid now. But for me, that's what's kept me is the small-town atmosphere here. And not wanting to have to drive.

Me: I've launched this online survey, and teachers are responding from all across the state. I've gotten a ton, more than anybody, of rural teachers who have responded to me. And they are railing against our state lawmakers. Why do you think rural teachers feel so disrespected or forgotten by their state representatives?

R: Well, first of all, the lawmakers will go make laws concerning schools when they have absolutely, positively no idea what goes on in the schools. They don't bother to come to the classroom and see what's going on here at all. Legislators—do I feel respected by them? Nope. Because if I did, I would see them asking for input before they make a law concerning education in the state of Oklahoma. They don't have a clue.

Me: Do you think rural teachers feel this way in particular? Because my teachers from suburban schools are saying that they feel most disrespected by their students or by this or that. But overwhelmingly, rural teachers have said they feel most disrespected by lawmakers.

R: I can just….I don't know if….[speaking outside of phone call] I don't know. I'm wondering…and I don't know if this is a problem we should be addressing. Should we invite lawmakers to attend, not only our classrooms—should we personally put the invite out there—should they be invited when we have staff development? Maybe they attend the bigger schools in bigger cities. Do they attend more there?

Me: I don't know if I really know the answer to that. I would think maybe they know a little more about them because their kids go to school there. They might just be a little more disconnected from rural areas.

R: You may be right there, yeah.

Me: It's just something really odd that I've been noticing, and I wondered if you had any thoughts about it. But it might just be that they don't live in rural areas, so they don't know what it's like. Could you tell me about a time when you felt most valued as an educator or generally when you feel most valued?

R: A specific time when I've felt most valued?

Me: If you can't think of one, then just generally when you feel good as a teacher.

R: Are we still working with peers and administration at the school level?

Me: Yeah, you can answer in that respect.

R: Or are we talking about parents or students?

Me: Whatever makes you feel most valued. Whatever group that is.

R: I probably feel the most valued when I have worked my buns off with a child, and I contact the parents to say that this child is doing nothing, and instead of slamming me for not doing the work for that child, supporting me and taking responsibility for the lack of effort from the student. That's probably when I feel the most valued, when a parent does not blame me for anything that's going wrong and will accept some responsibility on the side of that child. Other times that I've felt valued have been when they've asked my input as we've made decisions on curriculum, let's say, curriculum at the school. They as my input and want to know how I feel about it.

Me: What about any time, or just in general, when you feel least valued as a professional?

R: Least valued?

Me: Mhm.

R: It's when…just the opposite of what I said. When you've worked your buns off to help a child, and the child just will not give anything back. Then whenever you go past the child, to the parents, and it's all your fault. Because you've "done nothing."

Me: Can you remind me how long you've been teaching?

R: I'm on my 26th year.

Me: Do you think that or have you seen respect for teachers change since you first began teaching? This can be with parents and students or with administrators or the public. Anybody.

R: Yeah. I think it's definitely declined. It's gone downhill, I know for a fact. [speaking outside of phone call] Okay, Kody. You still there?

Me: Yeah.

R: Okay. I'm sorry.

Me: No, you're fine. You're alright.

R: Okay. Has respect gone down? Definitely. Everything, everything is the teacher's fault today. The teacher doesn't know what she's doing. Why that is, I don't really know. The biggest problem I see with the lack of respect for teachers is parents who really have no clue how to parent. They have absolutely no clue how to parent. How do you correct that problem? I really, really, really wish I knew. I don't know. But I definitely see that as disrespect because even when you have contact with a parent, when you're at Walmart and teachers are being blasted because they expect the child to do something. That's where I see the lack of respect.

Me: So it sounds like your biggest problem with not receiving enough respect is with parents, and that maybe bleeds over into the students?

R: Exactly. Parents and students both.

Me: Okay. I just wanted to clarify.

R: And also, I think one of the problems we have there is that the students have a lack of respect for their parents and that goes right into a lack of respect for anybody in authority.

Me: Sure. Absolutely. Have you ever worked under a male administrator directly, like a principal?

R: I've never had a male administrator right above me. We've had several male instructors, administrators, in administration, but never as my direct supervisor or principal, no.

Me: Do you think that would make you feel differently about how respected you are if you did have a male administrator?

R: Me, myself, probably not. But that does cause a problem with some people. Some people, because of the male, there's a problem with respect sometimes. Some

of the other teachers in the district who have male supervisors—administrators, I should say—I've heard them discuss this problem. But I've never experienced it.

Me: And they have issues with feeling talked-down to or…?

R: Exactly. The lack of respect that the male gives to the female.

Me: What do you think causes lack of respect for teachers in the public eye? I mean people who aren't directly tied to education, but feel like they have a say because they went to school once.

R: I actually don't know. I do see that. Like I said, I can go to Walmart and be standing in line, and someone who has nothing to do with education what so ever is going to badmouth teachers in the school. Why that is, I don't know.

Me: Some people have suggested that maybe it's the media. People just see teachers in movies, and think that's how all teachers are. Do you credit that? Or maybe the local news not covering good stories about teachers? What do you think?

R: I think sometimes the media gives us a negative…What's the word I'm thinking of?.....My mind's not giving me that word. What's the word I'm thinking of?

Me: Perception?

R: Yes.

Me: Okay. And have you ever had or considered another career?

R: Yes. I've considered accounting.

Me: And you never pursued that because teaching is…closer to home?

R: I never did mainly because I love being with kids and I liked helping kids. I never did. Nope. I never did pursue that avenue.

Me: What do you think Oklahoma teachers can do improve their situation within the state right now?

R: I think that we have to become more involved in the legislative process. I think that's a given. I think we have to do that. How do we combat….What do we do to help the lack of respect form parents? I really don't know, Kody. That is something that has plagued me for years. I don't know the answer to that. Like I said, I honestly feel like a lot of that has to do with a lack of parenting skills. And how do you combat that? I don't know.

Me: Do you think there is a correlation between our high rate of teen pregnancy, especially in rural areas, and this lack of respect?

R: You know, that exactly what I was about to say. Because, as you know, my own daughter was pregnant young. And [grandson's name – redacted] was born while she was still young. She was sixteen for another week before he was born. You want to know, Kody, what I really feel is a big problem?

Me: Sure.

R: It is….I think a lot of it can go right back to drugs, Kody.

Me: Yeah.

R: I think when a child, should I say, a teenager becomes pregnant, so much of the time, there is so much of a burden put on them that they turn to a crutch. And much of the time that crutch is drugs, and that leads down the wrong road. Most teenaged kids, a majority of them, don't stop with one child. Before they know it, there are two or three in that family. And like I said, I'm speaking from my own family.
Me: I mean, I think you're speaking about a lot of families. I think this is a pretty common….It's pretty common.

R: Yeah. Very common. I think teenaged pregnancy and drugs are… When I sit back and ask myself, I honestly cannot say—I don't know—why some teenaged mothers…it makes them grow up as a teenagers and others, like I said, need that crutch and turn to the wrong crutch at times. I don't know what makes one strong and one weak. I don't know.

Me: Yeah. I think if we had the answer to that, we could solve a lot of problems.

R: But I really do think that, right there, in itself, began the problem of respect to others.

Me: Yeah, I think so.

R: Even teachers are included in that.

Me: Yeah, I think you have to respect yourself before you can respect others. And lots of kids who have unfortunate family situations don't ever learn how to respect themselves, you know?

R: That is where I see the problem. That's where I see a huge problem we face today with respect and respecting your teacher. You know, never ever, never ever in my going to school did you ever talk back to a teacher. That's just common place, every day now. It's just a pure and simple lack of respect. They're ridiculous.

Me: I was subbing….

R: And I think that stems back, like I said, and don't get me wrong, I think it stems back to parents as well. Because they don't respect their parents either.

Me: Yeah. I think that's true. I was subbing a group of kindergarteners the other day, and they booed me. Like verbally booed me.

R: Ooh!

Me: I was just appalled. I was so mad. I couldn't believe it.

R: Wow.

Me: I know.

R: Why do you think, Kody? Why do you think that happened?

Me: Well definitely because they've at least learned how to be disrespectful to their music teacher, who I was subbing for.

R: Right.

Me: I don't know if they're that way to their normal teacher, but certainly she didn't have any of their respect. They didn't feel like it was necessary. I don't know if they thought, "Oh, she's just a sub" or "Oh, this is just music and we don't care about it" or what. But it was…I couldn't believe it.

R: Wow.

Me: Kindergarteners.

R: Yes, kindergarteners. Wow. That is unbelievable.

Me: Yeah. I don't know.

R: Unbelievable.

Me: Anyway, I've kept you about 30 minutes, so I'm going to make this our last question for today.

R: Okay.

Me: What advice would you give to new teachers or to people who are considering becoming teachers?

R: I hate to say this, but you know my grandson, [redacted], is going into education. English education. Don't write this in your report! But when he first said he was going to, I told him, "[redacted], you can't go into education if you don't have the desire to help those kids, because," I said, "number one: you're not going to get the money you deserve. Number two: you're not going to get the respect you deserve. If you decide to go into education, you definitely need to leave the state of Oklahoma." That's just how I put it.

Me: Right. Sure.

R: "Because," I said, "The state of Oklahoma is rock-bottom as far as teachers are concerned. Not only in pay, but in respect as well." And I would almost like to know, Kody, if other states have the same problems as well. As far as encouraging a teacher, I'm going to have to think on that. Because, like I said, it's been….When I first found out that's where he was headed, it was hard for me to encourage him to go into that field. It was. Because I think when you put forth your life—five years—to go to college…. Let's say an attorney did that, a state's attorney; an attorney gets out and they get respected. They aren't looked down upon like they're a know-nothing. Teachers don't get that respect. As time passed, I would just listen to [grandson – redacted]. I honestly did not have supporting words to help him. As soon as I say that, I've told him and I've told others too… Did we have Leadership kids when you were in school, Kody?

Me: Yeah.

R: I have to admit, that of all of the Leadership kids that I've had, [grandson – redacted] has probably been the best Leadership kid that I've ever had to help kids. He knows how to get down on their level. He knows how to help them. He has been frustrated, but knowing how well he works with the kids, it's just been hard for me to encourage him to keep in that field of study. So…I don't….

Me: You're in the same realm as other veteran teachers. They're saying, "Don't do it." I mean, my mom told me not to.

R: I have not told him not to because I have not wanted to be negative at all. So my stance has been just don't say anything. I try not to be negative. But I have told him, and he has said—he's said it since the beginning—and I hate it…hate it, hate it, hate it, but he's said, "Grandma, I know if I go into education, I'll leave the state of Oklahoma. I won't stay in Oklahoma." Do I want my only grandchild to leave the state of Oklahoma? I don't. But I also don't know, you know…. Things are going to have to change drastically for me to encourage him to stay in the field and stay here. I'll think about that and see if I can think of something positive. Because I don't have anything to say to encourage someone to stay in the field or who would be ready to get into the field.

Me: Okay. Any final thoughts or anything to say?

R: I don’t think so.

Me: Okay. Let me stop this really quick.

Ms. Robinson: Interview 2 (Modified Transcript)

Me: Let me get you on speaker phone here. Okay. Did you get…did I sent you the list of these questions?

Ms. Robinson: Yes, and that's what I'm looking for right now on this desk. I've got 5 million things on my desk that kids have given me all day. Hold on. You just start it, and I'll locate it. I'm looking for it right now.

Me: Okay. I realized, after I sent this to you, that some of these questions don't apply to you because you don't teach high school. You're my only person that doesn't teach secondary.

R: I don't teach what?

Me: High school.

R: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I don't.

Me: Any way, I'll probably have to skip over some of these on the fly here. Tell me a little bit about your journal entries. I haven't read them yet. I got them, and they look good. Tell me about some of the stuff you wrote in your journal.

R: I was surprised, actually, after we talked. Kody, it's like the next few people who came to my room, that's what they were talking about. Teacher disrespect. Or sometimes it was respect, but not a whole lot of the time. It was more disrespect than respect.

Me: Huh.

R: But, in the journal I…we had had…one of the questions you had asked me was about peers, and did I feel like I was treated respectfully amongst my peers. I had answered that truthfully—that I had—but evidentially, some of the other teacher may not feel that way, even here. I visited with some of them…well, one of the teachers in particular, she came in and she was upset. She had sent a child to the office because that child was having problems in her classroom and had stopped doing what she had asked. The teachers that had this child, they decided that they'll just take this child out of her classroom and send this child to P.E. And she was just kind of put out that they would do that without asking her.

Me: Oh, yeah.

R: It was like they did not respect her enough to…it's like they thought, "There's a conflict between the two of them and so let's just remove that child so there won't be the problem." I understand. You get Music as a class…Lord, have mercy. Who

knows where I've put those questions that you gave me. I've got everything else but that. I've got the stinking picture I even drew, that was so good.

Me: I thought they were good.
R: Oh, good lord. Oh, lord. I asked some of my kids, I said, "Who are my artists?" I had two or three of them raise their hands, "Why are you asking that Ms. [redacted]?" I said, "If these don't work," I said, "I may be asking you to draw me a picture."

Me: No, they were fine.

R: But I think sometimes people are feeling like they're not respected by their peers as well. I think one of my biggest eye-openings was talking to [redacted-teacher's name] at a wedding, and seeing the complete difference. She works at Jenks, where they're Free and Reduced Lunch is extremely low. I want to say that she said they'd just gotten an email saying that it's gone up to 12% or some kind of number like that. But we kind of wondered about…we kind of worried for her when she left [redacted-town] and went to Jenks Schools. We thought, "You're going to get up there with all the doctors and the lawyers and their kids, and they're going to tell you what to do and how to do it." And she said, "It is not that at all." She said that in the bigger school, she is extremely supported by all of her parents. She's never had a time when a parent hasn't been supportive. She said that it's a completely different world. She had just come in from a vacation that she had taken, and she used personal days to take it. Her…what would it be in Jenks education? We have the [redacted]EA here, but it would have been Jenks. That's one of the things they fought for and they won. Most spouses of teachers that work there, their spouse is in the corporate world, and they're not necessarily able to take a vacation during the summer time. And they can use their personal days as a vacation day. If that's when their spouse can take off, then they can do that. If they don't use up their personal days in one year, they can pull over at least two of them the next year as a personal day, so that, if the next year, they had a full week that they needed to go somewhere, she could go do that. So not only are her peers and the parents there very supportive and very respectful, also the administration is. And I thought, "Completely different world than this." But that's kind of some of the stuff I talked about.

Me: Yeah. I mean, my response to talking about Jenks: they have so many more resources.

R: Yes, they do.

Me: And it's kind of almost like—and I noticed this when I've been talking to my other two teachers that I'm interviewing—it's kind of like the more resources a school has, the more respectful they are toward teachers.

R: I think so, I think so.

Me: And I think it works for the states that way, too.

R: I agree, I agree. You know, at the same time, I've got this little girl—and I think I wrote that over the weekend because she wasn't here today—but I've got this little girl that has just…I've been wanting to pull my hair out. She won't do anything you ask her to do. She always comes-back. She talks back to you. When trying to get work out of her, you can keep her in at noon, you can keep her out of P.E., you can do whatever. It doesn't affect her. She still doesn't try. She is very disrespectful. So I finally called Mom, and after talking to Mom, "Yeah, she's doing the same thing at the house. But she can't stay at school, because I don't have a car to go pick her up." After talking to Mom and making the offer of keeping her at school and me bringing her home at 4:30 or 5:00, whenever she gets her work done, you know, the child has been completely different. Very respectful to me. Momma has been extremely respectful to me. But, Kody, part of me has wondered, if part of what I take as disrespect is not necessarily disrespect, but is coming from a parent and child that can't do better for themselves.

Me: Yeah.

R: I mean, you asking me these questions has made me sit back and think about that. Just me doing that one little thing…and I told the little girl, "Look, honey, I refuse to let you fall through the cracks." Because she's a smart little girl. But I mean her attitude just stunk like nasty. Very disrespectful of whatever you asked her to do, I don't care what it was. And like I said, next week, we might be back on first floor again. But she has been just a completely different person to have in class. She's almost been a joy to have in class. She does work. It really made me think. Mom has always been, because I've talked to her before, she's been very disrespectful, "Nope. She can't do this. She can't do that. She can't do something else." But once she allowed me that opportunity of keeping her after school—I can take her home when she gets her work done—it has been completely different with mom and with the daughter. It's got me wondering, "Is some of the same problem we have not exactly that same cycle? Those that just cannot."

Me: Yeah. Yeah, it sounds like to me that your student just wasn't getting enough, enough attention, enough something from somebody. You know?

R: Oh, yes. Exactly. And I know that's one of the problems because that is what the principal had said coming into this year. She said that she…no, it wasn't the principal. It was one of her teachers from last year. She said that she strived for attention. Even if it's the wrong attention, she'd get it. That's just about her alright.

Me: Well, I'm glad that this interview has been beneficial to you, and not just to me.

R: Very beneficial. It's made me actually think beyond what I see is happening to "is this really what's happening?"

Me: Good. Alrighty, so part of my thesis is actually looking at teaching over the history of modern teaching. And I'm sure you're aware that it's pretty much always been a woman's profession.

R: It has.

Me: Something that women do, and it kind of looked at as maybe a little more feminine, so men don't really get into it. Do you think that contributes to the disrespect of teachers—the fact that this is a woman's profession?

R: Yes, I know that was one of the questions you asked. I actually that that can be one of the problems: the lack of respect for women in general. I think that can be a problem.
Me: So, in elementary school, you don't see a lot of male teachers, right?

R: Do not. Right now, we have two.

Me: Do you think—and I want you to put this into the context of where you teach—do you think men make good teachers?

R: I think men can make good teachers. I go to church with a teacher that, actually I was in his first year that he taught. I was in his 8th grade classroom. He is still teaching, and he gets along well with kids. He has a way of reaching kids. He is actually teaching a class or two at the middle school still yet. He's been retired, but he's teaching one or two classes at the middle school for those kids who are struggling with math. I had him as an 8th grade math teacher. And he has told me, that…he said, "Oh, [redacted-name]. 8th grade. A kid comes to ask me a question, and I tell them, 'Go ask [redacted-name]. She can tell you the answer and tell you how to do it.'" He said, "I was so involved with football, I really wasn't worried about how they did math." And he said that he was surely glad to have someone who knew what they were doing and could do it for him. And that was…like I said, I've been out of school 41 years now, and it was 8th grade, so that's been 45 years ago that he taught me. And I thought, "That is…" Men who are coaches, that's their drive instead of teaching-teaching in the classroom. I'm sure you knew who and what you could get by with. I know [redacted-grandson] has told me the names, called the teachers by name. He could tell you the teacher that, you could start on a paper, as long as you fill a paper with words—you could fill it with the same thing over and over again—but as long as you started a paper with something that you were asked about and the last two sentences were about it—you'd get 100 on that assignment.

Me: Absolutely.

R: What kind of teaching is that?

Me: I've only ever had one male teacher who was not a coach, and he was a great teacher. But, I mean, he was the only male teacher that I've had that I think I could say that about, that they were a good teacher. But that's just my own experience. In bigger schools, I'm sure, there are lots more male teachers than there are coaching positions, so there are lots of male teachers. Kids in bigger schools have a little bit better experience, but I certainly did not. Why do you think that men stay away from elementary school?

R: Well, I don't know why the do. I know, I've only dealt with two men here at [redacted-school name] that were not involved in coaching as well. And of course Mr. [redacted] was one of those, and he ended up becoming a golf coach. And he loved the kids, but I…and we had one more who has gone to Texas to work. He never had anything to do with coaching as far as I knew of. But why they don't do it, I don't think they can…I don't think they get involved with the kids enough. That's the reason they don't.

Me: Yeah. To me it always seemed like, especially in elementary school, people always have this perception that it's a lot more like babysitting than it is like teaching. I think that's why. I think that's why a lot of men aren't drawn to it.

R: Exactly.

Me: But, being in high school, even in middle school, they have the benefit of also being coaches, which is sort of a masculine thing.

R: Right.

Me: I don't know.

R: Right.

Me: Sorry, I've got to skip some of these questions because they don't really apply to your situation. Do you think the teaching profession would benefit…would be benefitted as a whole if there were more male teachers?

R: Repeat that question again.

Me: Do you think it would benefit the teaching profession as a whole to have more male teachers?

R: I think it would. I think it would bring more respect to everybody if we had that. I kind of feel like…I feel like, in general—this is just me—in general, and the pay scale supports that thought, I don't think women in particular have ever gotten treated equally with their male peers. I don't care what…I don't care what their vocation is out there in the world. People with the same jobs, women get less pay than a man does. And I think that same thing carries over into teaching. Because we

are so predominantly female, I think…and most of our coaches, because most people…most people respect sports…but, umm, I do think that is one of the reasons we do have disrespect because of the female dominance in numbers.

Me: Can you think of a person who you would consider your closest male counterpart in teaching? You don't have to say their name.

R: Yeah, I know.

Me: Alright, are you a better teacher than he is?

R: That's a hard question. I probably care more, yes.

Me: Do you think that you get the same level of respect that he does?

R: Probably not.

Me: What makes you think that you probably don't? Just because he's a man or do you have some sort of personal…?

R: I know that's part of it. But the man I'm thinking of is a coach as well. And, like I said, I think sports is a huge…I think sports is a huge pull with most of the population, at least here in [redacted-town].

Me: Alright. Let's get away from all of these gender questions.

R: Okay.

Me: Why do you think so many people in the public who aren't necessarily tied to education feel so invested an opinionated about the direction public schooling is going?

R: Now…ask that question again.

Me: Why do you think that so many people, just in the general public, not necessarily people who are tied to education, just people in the public…why do you think they feel so invested and opinionated about the direction that public schooling should be going?

R: I really can't answer that question. I'm trying to think.

Me: I guess, to phrase it a different way, my question here is just kind of asking about…so teachers kind of generally have this negative view in the public eye, and it seems like everybody has an opinion about public schooling.

R: Exactly. What it should be. What the teacher should be doing. “They need to be teaching this way.”

Me: I’m just kind of wondering if you maybe have an idea what gives people the idea that they…they have a stake in public education.

R: You know…and I don’t want to sound bad when I say this, but I think a lot of it, Kody, is a lack of education in themselves. Because—this is just me, myself, and i—I feel like the parents that I deal with, parents that are more educated: you get more support from, you get more respect from. People who are not educated, they’re doing good if they have a high school degree: you get less respect from them. I’m thinking that it may have something to do with their education. I really don’t know that, but from my point of view, that’s why. Most of the time anyway.

Me: Okay. So this next question might take you just a second to imagine. Tell me about, if you could create your ideal school, what would that look like? What are the students learning? How are they learning? Who are the ideal teachers and parents and administrators? What’s your ideal school situation?

R: You know, I hate to say this, but as [redacted] was sharing more and more about their school, compared to the small rural school like we have here, it would be that school where the parents are involved, where the parents are supportive, where they’re there for you. Yes, I know, we have a completely different clientele...I meant to look that up and find out what our Free and Reduced Lunch rate. It’s got to be way up there. I mean, I’m going to say that it’s in the 70s, but I’m not sure exactly what it is. I haven’t heard this year, and I meant to look that up for you. I can do that if you need the numbers.

Me: I’ll look it up.

R: It would be so nice to have parents who were supportive. Parents who made sure…They never have a problem with…according to [redacted] their school, with the clientele that they have, they never have a problem with a child who doesn’t do homework, for instance. I know, and I tell my kids that I understand this, but it’s a slap in my face when they have five questions they can’t do for homework that night. That is complete disrespect for me. I tell my kids that; I’ve always told my kids that. It upsets me because they don’t think enough of what I’m doing to do a little bit on their own. I think, in an ideal classroom in an ideal school, you would have that support. I don’t know that that will ever happen here. And to have staff, to have peers, that support you for who you are and what you do, I just think that would be absolutely marvelous. How would kids be taught? I think the “how”…In a perfect situation, I would like to see them do-away with all the testing that we do. It seems like, before we had all the testing we had, you could come in and you would have fun learning new concepts because you can do those concepts in so many different ways. But state testing has become, we’ve had more and more and they mean more and more to the schools…you don’t have that opportunity to get a little

side-tracked and have fun with a subject. I'd like to see us back away from the state tests and learn the math because of math not because of a stinking test.

Me: So I looked up the Free and Reduced Lunch rate, and it looks like it's somewhere around 70%.

R: Yeah.

Me: Yeah. Which is a lot.

R: Uh huh. Compared to Jenks' 12%.

Me: Yeah, but the state average is 50%. So…

R: Uh huh.

Me: So it's a state problem.

R: Yeah, it is. It's not…And, you know, even…like…I've heard some people say that some cities have done-away with…it's not call….oh, what's it called…it's not called "free housing." You know, people who get housing based on their income?

Me: Section 8.

R: Yeah. Some cities, I understand, are doing away with section 8 housing. [Redacted-city] has several different locations of section 8 housing, and I personally feel like that is one of the reasons we have having more and more disrespect at the school, more and more problems with students at the school. Because of their lack of respect for…They don't have an example. They don't have an example of a parent out there that is…you know, half of them don't even work. They don't realize that you have to work to get through live. They think you're going to just sit on the couch all day. And I think that is one of the things that boils over into the classroom.

Me: Sure. What's one thing that you would say or do for parents and students in order to encourage them to be more respectful toward teachers?

R: I would, like I said, even sharing with my little girl this past week, I think talking to parents more, seeing their side. I think that is one thing I'm really going to try to work on for myself.

Me: What do you do….oh, sorry. Go ahead.

R: Go ahead…I think, you know, you don't know where they're coming from unless you walk a mile in their shoes, and I don't think I could do that. But, at the same

time, I think it that if I find out a little bit more about them, it kind of helps that situation.

Me: Yeah. So what's the biggest way that students and parents, and even the public, just anyone can show that they respect you or that they respect teachers in general?

R: The one way they show respect…I think that it just comes down to support, Kody. Just being supportive. It can be anything from being supportive of a teacher who is having a behavior problem with a child. Instead of taking a child's side of it, find out why that behavior is such a problem. And, you know—I wrote this down in my journal one day—as a child, I always wanted to do the best I could. Maybe this is just me, maybe this is just who I am. I always wanted to be the best student that I could be because I wanted my teacher to be proud of me. Number one, it was my daddy; I wanted my daddy to be proud. But I wanted my teacher to be proud of me. I can remember whenever I would see my teachers out and about, I would almost feel like I did not have…I didn't have a right…I was so low on the totem pole that I didn't have a right to even talk to them out in public because I was just this little pee-on and they were this great person. It wasn't just one of my teachers. I remember that I always wanted to do my best for them. I think it is generational. I think I've seen generation after generation have that lack…I think this part goes out of the classroom even… [redacted-husband's name] and both of my kids and anyone I know that has been in a management-type situation where they have been over workers, the quality of workers we have today is so much worse than it was 20, 30 years ago. People don't know how to work anymore. I think that comes right into the classroom. That problem that we're having in the workforce today…I'm not talking school at all…Because none of my kids or my husband or some of my friends that I know have been in that situation, complained about workers 20 years ago. The group of workers 20 years ago and the workers that are entering the workforce today…they have no clue how to work. I think that trickles…that exact same thing trickles right into the classroom.

Me: Yeah. I think I can definitely see that. It almost seems like this idea, at least to me, this idea that everyone needs to go to college has kind of pushed education into this weird place where not everyone can achieve. It's made education more than just learning the basics. You now have to learn so much more. So when we have kids that aren't achieving, then we get standardized testing and all this stuff. But we've created this situation for ourselves, where we've got this much harder work, and we have a group of students who just can't do it. And when they can't do it, we have to do everything we can to help them along, so that we don't look bad.

R: Yeah, yeah.

Me: Yeah. Sorry I'm coughing. I'm just still getting over this cold. It's terrible.

R: I am so sorry.

Me: Oh, it's okay. I don't feel bad anymore. I think I just have allergies. You know, you move to a new place…

R: It's that time of year, I'm afraid.

Me: Yeah.

R: One of the teachers here has had pneumonia. She had nothing, no allergies, no problems, nothing, and then one day she could hardly breathe. She went to the doctor, and she checked something else and then she said, "Let me take a chest x-ray." She had pneumonia.

Me: Wow. That's…

R: So don't do that.

Me: That scares me. Okay, so let's…I'm going to skip some of these questions because this has already been a pretty long interview, and I don't want to take up too much of your time. So what is one thing about teaching that you wouldn't tell anyone or that you would be hesitant to tell someone?

R: You know, I saw that question, but I…I don't know.

Me: Yeah, so both of my other teachers needed an example, but once I said something, they got it. One of my teachers said that she would never tell anyone that teaching will break your heart.

R: Oh yeah. It can do that. And, you know, teaching just has so many of those situations that you would love to help the world but you have to help one child at a time. But when you help one child, there's another 20 at their side that need that same help. You just can't reach everybody.

Me: Yeah. I think that's probably the hardest thing that teachers have to face early on in their careers. You can't be the savior of all of these kids. You just have to send them home, no matter what that home looks like.

R: If you can just help the one or two that you feel like you can help, knowing that there's going to be a hoard of those that need that same help, but you're not going to be able to help every one of them. You can't do it.

Me: Yeah. So how do you feel about teachers on social media? And do you think that some teachers' activities on social media has a negative impact on how the public perceives teachers?

R: I think teachers have to be extremely careful on social media. I'm bad, I know I am. I mean, I don't get on Facebook a lot. What I see sometimes on Facebook, here

in [redacted] anyway, is so much negativity and so much tearing education down or the schools or the teachers or somebody. Tearing them apart. I have sometimes seen some of the things that some teachers will put on, and I think you have to be so extremely careful with what and how you say on social media. Because it affects everybody. I think social media is, you know, kind of like—and I think TV is in the same thing—they're looking for things to tear a teacher or tear a school apart by. I maybe shouldn't think that way, but I do think that instead of looking for the good, they're looking for things, "How can I tear this apart?"

Me: What are some things that you do in your classroom to try to earn or to set up expectations of respect from your students?

R: Some things that I do in my classroom…One of the things we do here definitely is the Six Pillars of Character. Trying to instill character in kids. And like I said, I think it comes back to that our parents don't know how to parent, so you have to be able to parent for them, with them, I should say too. But even just little things, like when you see a child being so disrespectful to their peers, just letting them know that is not respectful. To try to teach kids "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am." I really don't think kids even realize sometimes how they affect others. Just take the time to talk to them.

Me: Yeah. I think that's especially important at your level of teaching because they're still very young. They still don't know that the things they do and the things they say affect other people. You know? Their little world still just revolves around themselves.

R: Exactly.

Me: It's much harder when you get into secondary and they should know better. You always have that mindset that this 15-year-old should know better than to say that.

R: Exactly. We still see that in grade school. You still see that in grade school. Like I said many times, it is an eye-opening experience when you see that the apple doesn't really fall far from the tree. When you actually start seeing the parents and how they are, you see exactly why the kids act like they do.

Me: Do you think that parents feel very welcome at your school?

R: I feel like they do at our school. I can't tell you of any instance where a parent has ever told me that they don't feel welcome here. We try to have an open door, and if a parent has time to come spend a few minute reading with a child each day or going over multiplication facts with a child each day, I mean, we try to accept anybody, any of our parents who could do that. We're pretty open.

Me: Do you think that this national scare about school shootings has made it more difficult to be inviting to parents and community members?

R: I think it has.

Me: Yeah, I think I've noticed that. I do so much subbing…You don't see anyone in the building that's not…that you can't identify as a teacher or staff member. You know? You don't ever see any adults.

R: We do have…We have lost, for instance, we have lost our media specialist. And our media…the person in our media is just an aide now. And we've had several members of the community, but they're members of the community who have been here forever…you know, we know about them. I think not only the school shootings and stuff, but I also think the…oh, what should I say…like kids that are abused by an adult. I think we're seeing more and more of that. I think that's the reason you have to be extremely careful. That carries over, not just to the school, but our church. We do a background check if you are involved with the kids at all at our church. I think, even with volunteers at school, you'd need to be very careful with that.

Me: Yeah. I have a friend who is doing his entire doctoral dissertation over that exact topic. Background checks and how often are kids abused by volunteers?

R: Kody, you went to—if I may ask you this—you went to, in Oklahoma…You went from [redacted] where 99% of the people in [redacted] knew you to, even when you went to Norman, and then now to Fayetteville. When you went to a new state, where they didn't know you from Adam, before you could sub, did you have to…did they do background checks and stuff on you?

Me: Yes. For Oklahoma…So I subbed, when I was still living in Norman, I subbed in the Oklahoma City district and in Moore. And Oklahoma City has surprisingly rigorous background checks, drug testing, all that stuff.

R: Did you have to pay for that or did they do that?

Me: They paid for drug testing and I paid for background checks, because I had to do a background through the State Department of Education. I needed the background check for my teaching license and all kinds of stuff, so I just paid for it so that I could use it for multiple things. But at Moore, it was definitely not as rigorous. They didn't make me take a drug test, which I was very surprised about. I thought that anytime you worked with children, you had to take a drug test, but they didn't make me.

R: Okay. Let me ask you this. It's not just working with kids. Any job out there, they do a random drug test from time to time. Do you want to ask me how many times I've been tested?

Me: Probably none.

R: Do you want to ask me how many background checks I've had done in my life?

Me: Probably none.

R: When our church, began making us have a background check, they contacted the school to see if they could save that amount of money for everybody—because the people who work at school were just going to see if they could get a copy of the background check they had done—no, I never had a background check. But, yeah, I that's coming more and more. I think you have to be so careful today.

Me: Yeah, and I think that maybe scares some people away from teaching.

R: I agree with you.

Me: Especially, the drug testing part of it. Because, as marijuana becomes more and more legalized, more and more people are going to engage in it—and that doesn't make them bad people, just like drinking doesn't make them bad people—you know? I'm not saying that, but I think, if you have a teacher or even a substitute that is like, "I really want to do this, but I went to Colorado and smoked some weed, and now I can't." I don't know. It's very invasive of teachers' personal lives, when it doesn't necessarily need to be. I mean, I do think that we work for the state, so we should probably have to have a state background check. But when I moved to Arkansas, I had to get an FBI background check, like I was a terrorist.

R: Wow.

Me: It's just like…Who…No.

R: Yeah.

Me: It's crazy. But they didn't make me take a drug test.

R: They did not make you take a drug test?

Me: No. The only place I've ever taken a drug test is Oklahoma City.

R: Wow. I mean, like I said, all of my kids—I don't have but two—but my kids, my husband, family members in the workforce, they randomly have to take a drug test. You would think in 25 years, that sooner or later, I'd have to have one. But I've never had one. You'd think, sooner or later, my name would be pulled out of a hat.

Me: Well, I guess they chalk it up to being a veteran. I don't know.

R: I guess.

Me: I guess they assume if you've been doing it this long with no problems, then you're not going to have any.

R: I don't think they send anybody at [redacted] for a drug test. I've never heard anybody say that, "They called me to the office today. I had to do a drug test."

Me: I know that at the high school…so, when I was in high school, they called students out and I think they maybe called a couple of teachers out. But I'm kind of assuming that those teachers, just knowing who they were, were maybe problematic teachers. So…yeah. But, yeah, I've never heard of...In any other district beside Oklahoma City, I've never heard of a teacher having to take a drug test.

R: Mmmk. I haven't here. I haven't seen that happen here.

Me: In some of the bigger schools in Tulsa, maybe they do. I think they just do it because their teacher turnover is so crazy that they're getting new people in all the time. You know? So they kind of never know who they're going to end up hiring. It could be a bad person. I don't know. Yeah. It's kind of weird. I have mixed feelings about it. We want to protect our children, but what about our teachers who don't want to…who just want to be professionals and don't want to have to give all that information out.

R: Yeah.

Me: I don't know. Okay, let's do the last couple of questions here. How do you gauge the professionalism of the teachers you work or interact with?

R: How do you gauge their professionalism?

Me: Do you find them to be pretty professional or do you have some rotten apples?

R: I've found that, with the majority, most of them are very professional in what they do and how they conduct themselves.

Me: So I'm sure that you've noticed that the way teachers dress has shifted. And this is something my mom talks about all the time. Do you think teachers now, just wearing jeans and relaxed business clothing, do you think that has anything to do with how respected they are?

R: I know it has changed, and I saw that question. To be honest with you, I think as a whole, not just teaching, as a whole, the professional dress has become more relaxed. When…Do I think that's a cause of lack of respect? I don't know that it is. But then it could be at the same time. I just think, for instance [redacted] who worked at the bank for years, whenever I think about walking into the bank, I think of seeing someone with a suit on. And those women who work in the bank, I'd see

most of them with even a suit on. At least a jacket and either a skirt and high heels or slacks and a jacket and a shirt. But whenever you see…I just say that because she's mentioned it to me…when I see people at the bank, who are not dressed in those high heels and dress or that three-piece suit…do I have less respect for them? I don't think I do. I know when the kids see me wear a pair of jeans or something and be so thrilled that we get to wear a pair of jeans, they say, "Ms. [redacted], what's the big deal?" They don't realize that we don't get to wear jeans, you know. I can't really say that I know that I see a lack of respect, but it could be. It's all such a generational thing to me. If we went back to the suit and stuff, would we get more respect? I don't know. Maybe so.

Me: I'm asking this question because, on my online survey, I had a teacher who was outraged that she had seen teachers rallying at the capitol in t-shirts. And I was just like, "I've never thought about that before." That it makes people see teachers as less professional when they wear t-shirts to be outside all day. I don't know. It was just such an odd comment that it stuck out to me.

R: Yeah. And as I think back, like I said, I kind of think that's generational as well. I couldn't tell you that I remember any of my teachers ever wearing jeans. I never remember that happening.

Me: Alright, let's make this the last…well, I've got two questions, but one of them is kind of silly. After having considered the topic of teacher respect for weeks, what do you think teachers can do to gain more respect in the state of Oklahoma?

R: You know, I kind of think just being more outspoken. Letting the word out, I think. I honestly think, and I've talked to several people about this because it's made me think about it more because you brought it up with me…but I've heard so many people comment that parents don't know how to parent these days. How do we combat that? And, Kody, I really don't know how to combat that, but that's one thing we could do would be to teach a parent how to parent. I think that would get more respect in the classroom. That's just me.

Me: Okay.

R: I don't know the answer. I don't know how to do that.

Me: Sure. Alright, here is the last question because we've been on the phone for an hour and ten minutes. So I'm going to use a pseudonym for you when I write this?

R: A what?

Me: A pseudonym.

R: Alright.

Me: What would you like it to be?

R: Oh good lord. I don't know!

Me: Do you want me just to make one up?

R: Make it up.

Me: Alright. Okay.

R: [inaudible]

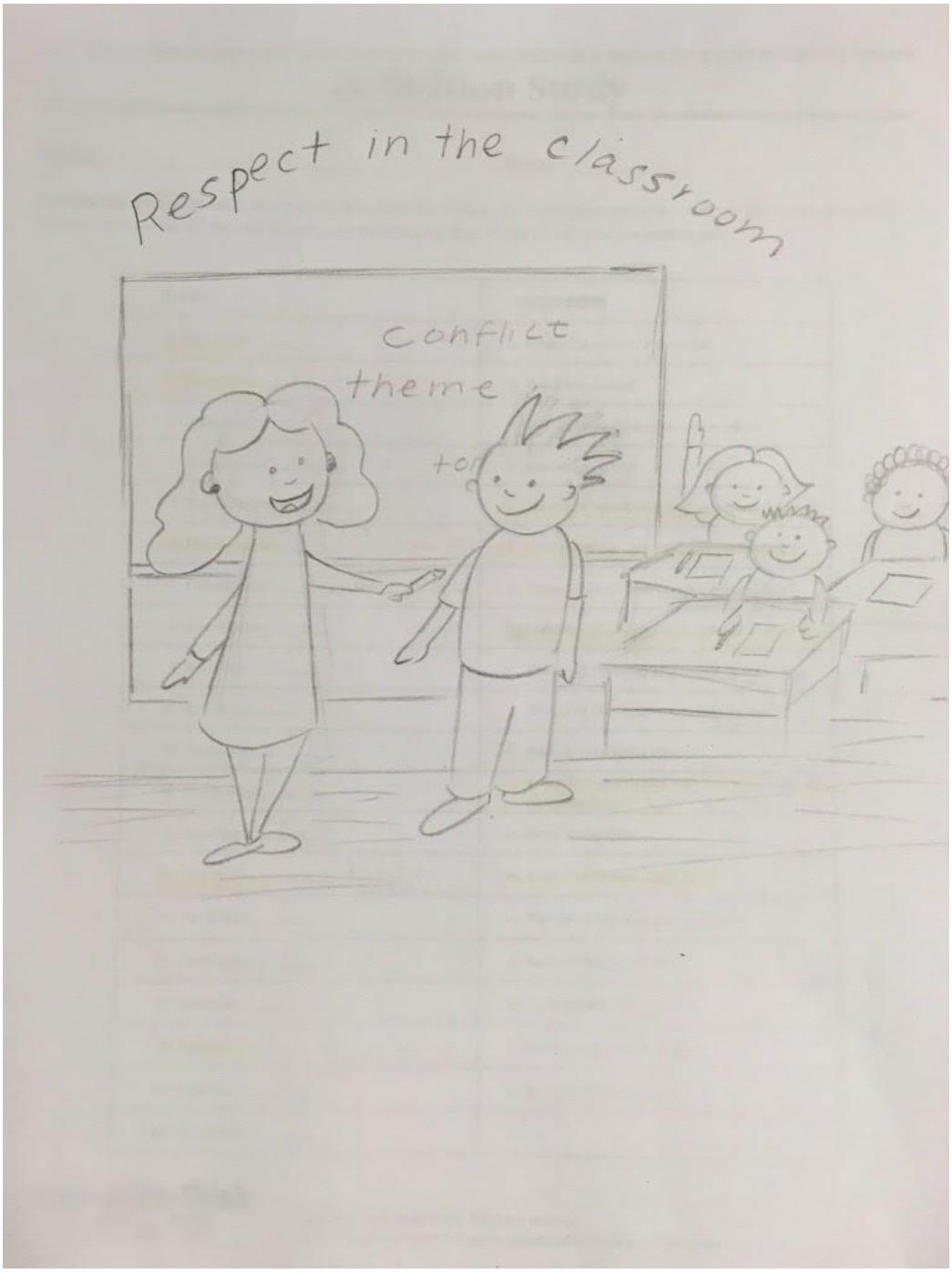
Me: Do what?

R: Make up that Shanny business.

Me: Yeah.

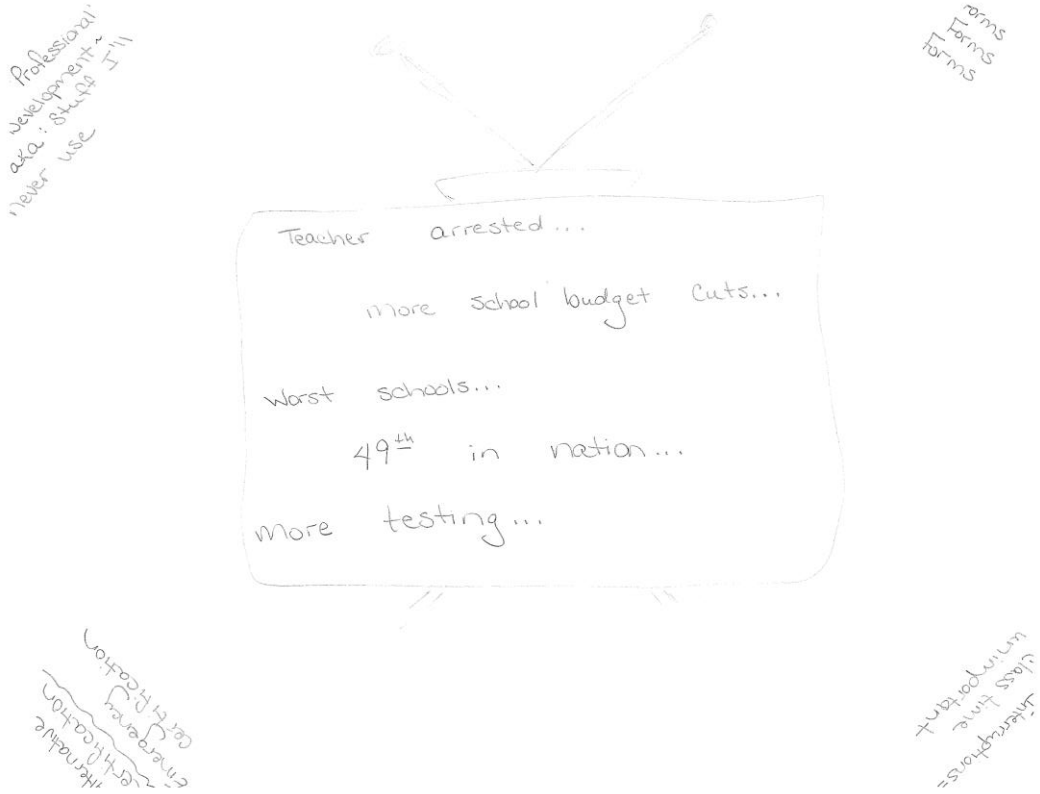
Appendix C: Visual Representation of Respect

Ms. Dee



Ms. Allison

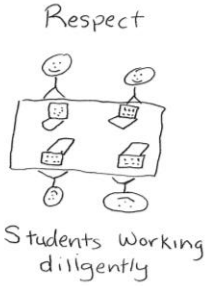
Disrespect

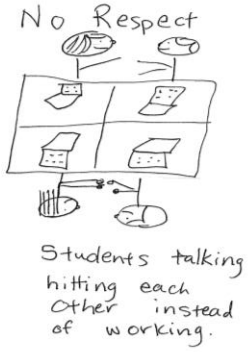


Respect


Few Interruptions on P.A
XEROX
NOT BROKEN
earing
s
ool
SMART™
Outlook
• No more useless testing!
• Teachers receive raise to reflect professionalism!
• TLE revised to evaluate true effectiveness!
• On tonight's news: teachers do great work!
• Admins HELPING teachers!
• Redundant meetings a thing of the past!
current technology
parents involved
supplies
ON TIME
NEW text books
READS

Ms. Robinson


Respect
Students working diligently


No Respect
Students talking hitting each other instead of working.

Appendix D: Journal Entries

Ms. Dee

Journal Entries: Student/Teacher Respect

-The morning hours are the best. My first class period of the day is 2nd hour, so students are awake, but are still fresh and focused. Students are much better at being respectful and following the directions at this time. Later in the day (5th and 7th hour) students struggle to remain respectful and follow directions because they are hungry, tired, or just spent and ready to go home.

-A student asked, "Why are you so tiny?" Another student noted that kids talk over me because I'm so little. This reminded me of your question and being a petite, female teacher. I see myself as being no different from any other educators, but, clearly, students notice and respond to teacher appearances. If I was an older woman, I think I would (or, hopefully, will) be respected more.

-I find that it is important to communicate your expectation to students, not only for regular classroom rules and procedures, but when it comes to the broader context of what it looks and sounds like to respect others. A short, quiet, one-on-one reminder like, "Chris, please pick up your trash. When you leave trash on the floor, you are being disrespectful to my classroom and myself," can be effective. When I take a moment to explain how I notice these little things and how it really makes a difference to me, I see a change in the behavior.

-one-on-one convos outside of the classroom are effective for the same reason.

-Students like when I reveal who I am as a real person. I feel a new level of respect with classes that know me more. For example, on Mondays I usually ask about their weekend, but also tell them about mine. They liked when I told them a personal ghost story experience when it came up in conversation (we got off topic while discussing the vocab word, skeptical.)

-Students want immediate feedback on grades and want you to enter grades in a timely fashion. That is one simple thing that can help/hurt the amount of respect you receive from some students.

-Students disrespect me by talking when I'm talking, questioning/complaining about work, and listening to headphones without permission. Students often talk, miss the directions, and then need one-on-one help because they didn't listen the first time. I view this as disrespect towards me and their peers.

I felt disrespected today by a student who talks down to me in a whiney and judgemental tone. She called me over to her, complained when I did not give her immediate attention, and then went on about how I was disorganized, and gave students too empower3000 work. She said that everyone was talking about it in English, and I could ask her teacher. This was during a week a make-up work day when students were completing missing empower3000 assignments. In reality, we do only the 2 required empower articles a week. I also view myself as an organized person. I felt bothered by her comment, but always remain very.

-I also feel disrespected when I see students in the hallway talking, and they are late to class or fail to show up. I view being very tardy as more disrespectful than not showing up at all.

Ms. Allison

"Professional development"

Required to attend meetings that are supposed to help me be a better teacher. Supposed to teach me something I can do to better the lives of kids.

Well start with a "team building" activity: Get into groups according to your favorite vegetable. Discuss the merits of turnips over squash. Stop talking. Line up according to your birthday. Stand and report your birthday. Next you pass the

Calendar test? Stop talking.

Next: Make sure kids follow this book of rules. Inspect them daily to ensure their fashion choices conform to our policy. Send kids who dress incorrectly to administrator. If you can find one. We will decide if your fashion judgement meets our standards. Reasons for these standards? No need for you to know that.

Next: Discussion of test scores. Yes,

We can agree that the scores have little to no relevance to the children themselves - especially the kids who may struggle. We can agree that the tests do not measure accurately the degree of learning that has happened. However, these test scores must improve. Sure, we value teachers, but your "professional" judgement is simply discarded - you must show a pie chart that tracks the degree to which your

students were able to choose the correct answer. Never consider the special needs or abilities - focus solely on the numbers.. Now design a new test to measure these standards - no wait, these standards - or you can chose from the millions of tests out there that also do not measure what these children know or ever need to know. If test score improvement is not shown, you will have to attend more meetings and discuss

more vegetables.
After lunch, sit with teachers you don't know, who teach a totally different subject than you do. Answer these ambiguous questions about this imaginary data. Explain your results on this poster. Hold the poster so we all can see and evaluate your work. Throw the poster away. Stop talking.

Here's a video that is irrelevant. Watch this. Stop talking.

Now take all you've learned to today and go to your rooms. When we come to check on you, be sure you are using the charts we gave you. Make sure the posters we gave you are on the walls. Put your goals on the board so we can check them. Do everything on this list or else. Do not consider that these contrived ways of doing things do not fit your individual style. Just do it.

Keep up with grading. Grade frequently. Do not worry if the

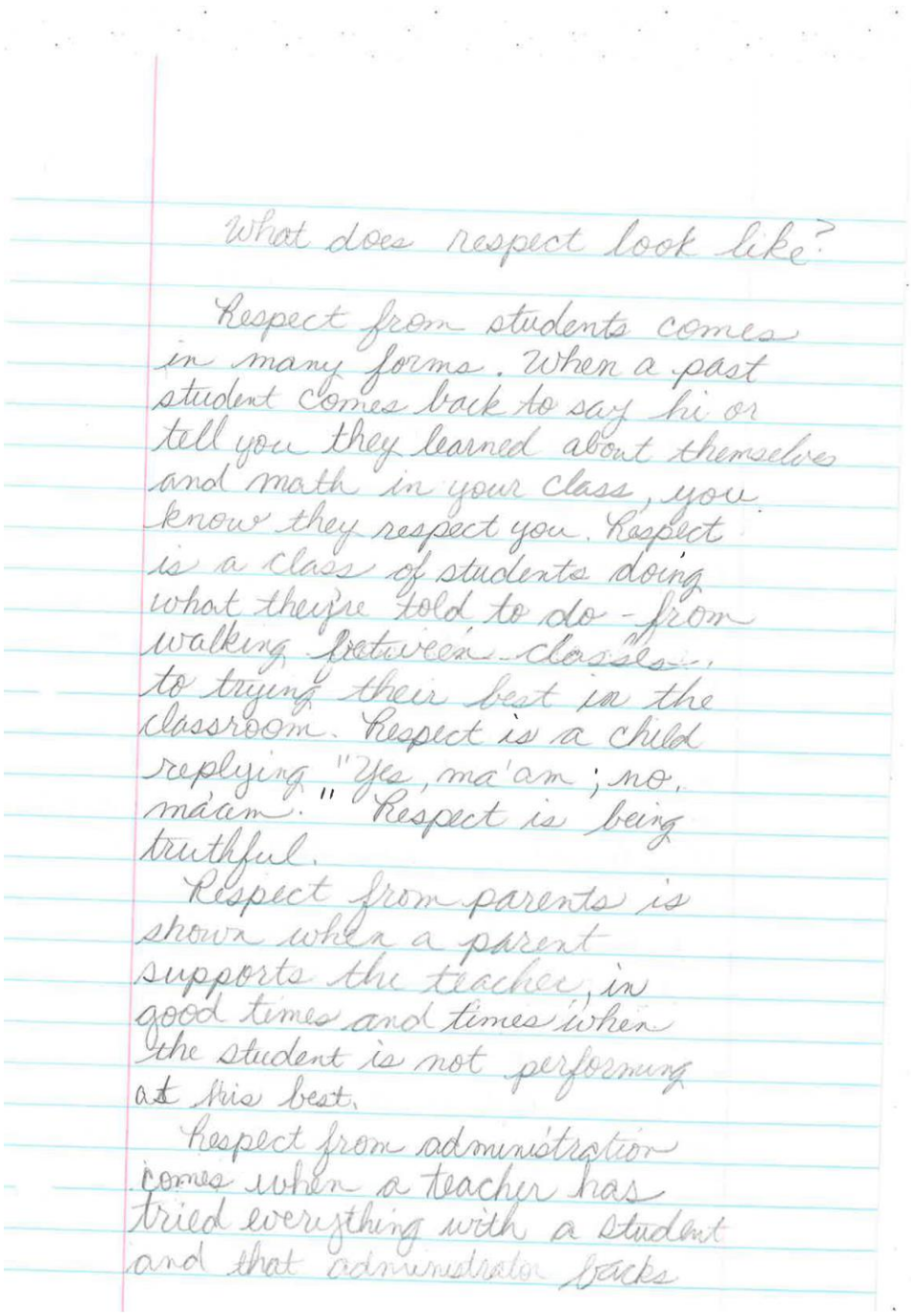
measurement has anything to do with the kid(s) or the subject. Just fill in the boxes for our records. All the boxes.

Give kids no time to think, create, laugh, or explore. Keep them on task constantly. We will interrupt you with announcements, phone calls, emails - read them all right away. - aides at the door, picture days, assemblies, paperwork, tests, and other things to keep us all off a thought track.

There. We appreciate you. Have some candy.

And don't complain about our policies or actions. Don't question the relevance of any of this. We are keeping a permanent record for you and will note your "attitude" in our evaluation of you.

Ms. Robinson



What does respect look like?

Respect from students comes in many forms. When a past student comes back to say hi or tell you they learned about themselves and math in your class, you know they respect you. Respect is a class of students doing what they're told to do - from walking between classes to trying their best in the classroom. Respect is a child replying "Yes, ma'am; no, ma'am." Respect is being truthful.

Respect from parents is shown when a parent supports the teacher, in good times and times when the student is not performing at his best.

Respect from administration comes when a teacher has tried everything with a student and that administrator backs

the teacher.

Respect from legislators is apparent when those legislators look for any possible ways to provide appropriate compensation. It also comes when legislators seek advice from teachers before passing laws that effect teachers.

As a child, I always respected my teachers. I looked up to them, I wanted to do my best for them, as well as myself and my parents. As a student, I respected my teacher to know not only what they taught, but how they taught. As a child at home, my parents respected my teachers because they supported the teacher; if we got busted @ school, we got a worse one at home. I raised my own kids in the same way. Many today do not have that respect. They are not taught it, so is it our job as teachers to teach that?

9-19 Do we get respect from legislators? No, if we did they would find a way to provide money and get teachers the pay raise we deserve. If educators were respected, we would get more pay. We have too many educators leaving our state, even going to surrounding states, to make $10,000 to $20,000 more per year. One friend taught 25 years in OK, 10 years in TX, and at retirement makes more from TX than OK. How should that be right if teachers were respected in OK and received comparable pay?

9-20 Music teacher comes in my room before school. She is a very good teacher - 35 year career. She had trouble with a 4th grade student. When she talked to his homeroom teacher, his teacher said that since the student and music teacher didn't get along, they would just send

the child to PE every day, and he would not go to music. The regular teacher was quite young, and music teacher felt that this "young teacher" did not respect her enough to back her up in front of a student.

Respect comes in many forms. I guess some teachers at Collins do feel that other colleagues do not respect the older teachers.

9-21 I visited with special ed teacher today. She wanted to let me know how a parent had told her how horrible we at Collins are with IEPs. "Stroud teachers do a great job with IEPs." This all happened as she was trying to set a date for an IEP. The dad was upset that his child needed to write spelling words 3x each. "You teachers should take care of that at school."

Respect? - NO - Parents

do not want to be a parent. If anything causes them to do a little work, they are too lazy.

9-22 I asked the nurse to come to my room to take a students temp. (Student can't leave room because it takes 30 min. or so to make it the the office + back.) (Student would not pick up a pencil or do anything.) After taking the child's temp, the nurse told her that many students are struggling with allergies right now, but she was not running a fever and should give it till noon + try to make it. Student argued with her, and nurse told her 2-3 times to please be respectful. "Respect your teacher and do your work." There it is again RESPECT. Parents don't respect teachers. In turn students do not.

9-23 Respect - Is it a generational thing? People do not respect police, teachers, anyone? Is this a generation of I want to do what I want to do, when I want to do it?

9-24 Nicole Bush's wedding: Jess McCain who did track at Collins and went to Jenks last year as media specialists. Jess just come back from Vacation to Colorado - just used her 3 personal days because it was when her husband could get off. Jenks (bigger city school) says most teacher spouses are in the corporate world. Teachers are allowed to take personal days for any vacation, etc. Personal days can carry over to personal days (2 of them) the next year. She can take a full week if she wants. At Jenks parents are involved constantly. "It's a completely different world!"

Sounds like Jenks respects their teachers! Jess said the principal reported this year that their population is

changing. Jenks has 15% free & reduced lunch this year. Bristow sits at . Many Jenks parent are doctors and lawyers. When I asked if those parents treated her as if the knew more than she did? She replied, "No, they are very supportive." A different world!

9-26 Respect - we try to teach it as a Pillar of Character, but are we making a dent? When many of our students come from homes where parents think they should be "given" everything in life, do kids respect themselves? You have to respect yourself before you an give respect to others.

9-27 1¢ Sales tax - going to teacher raises
#779 State Question - Boren respects teachers!

9-28 If a child really respects his teacher, would he not want to please the teacher? Would he not complete

his homework?

9-30 Respect came today from our Education Foundation. They work hard to support teachers, thank teachers, and offer grants for items in the classroom.

I was thinking today of 2 very special notes I received from past students, offering thanks. We received several notes, but 2 are special because they came for students who struggled in the classroom both in academics and behavior.

Respect also came from United Way reps saying thank you to teachers for doing a great job.

10-1 Respect came this week from a mom. When I called to tell her a child was not trying, etc. and I needed her to stay after school for detention. After listening to her tell the child

does the same thing at home, but child could not stay @ school for detention because she had no way of picking her up. After offering to take the child home myself, mom said child could stay. Child has stayed a few times. I tell mom, she stays, I take her home. The mom has said "thank you" several times. The student has done so much better. She is very appreciative of my time.

Did I mistake disrespect for inability to do better? Can mom really not afford a car? An eye opener?