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Dr. Newstreet

History of American Education

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Interview Transcript

(0:01) ALLBRITTON: So, thank you so much for agreeing to me with me today. I am James Allbritton, and it is 4:05 on April 13th 2021. I am with [BROTHER'S TEACHER] through Zoom. I want to clarify that I am going to record this interview and it will be uploaded to the UD Oral History Repository. Is that alright with you, [BROTHER'S TEACHER]?

(0:23) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Absolutely.

(0:25) ALLBRITTON: Sweet. So I just wanted to start off the interview with just a background of you. Uh, what is your educational background as a student?

(0:33) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Okay, as a as a student, well, finished high school. Which is what I'm trying to get them to do now and you know, where I teach, um, I got a BS in social sciences. I got a Master in Education. And then I went back and got a dual credential in English. So I have the dual credential in social science and English.

(0:52) ALLBRITTON: Sweet. Um, so you said uh dual credential, science and English. How did that

(1:00) BROTHER'S TEACHER: social sciences, so like the history

(1:01) ALLBRITTON: social sciences? So history? Yeah. So how did that, um, make you want to become a teacher?

(1:12) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I, I kind of briefly looked over some of these questions. And I did chuckle at that one because I don't know when the epiphany happened. I'm not - I can tell you it surely didn't happen when I was personally in school. If someone had said to me, "oo, when you're older, you'll be a

teacher I would go “ew”. But um I think what actually happened even though it sounds ridiculous, I ended up in the wrong class. And yet, it was serendipitous. And it was the right class. I was in a history class for teachers when I meant just to take a history class. But back then we used to have to dial up for our classes, we didn't have, you know, computer to kind of enroll in classes. And so there was some confusion. And I ended up in this room and the professor was phenomenal. He was so engaging, he was so alive. And even though I realized within about two minutes that I was in the wrong class (this wasn't appropriate for my degree at the time). Um, I all of a sudden realized, no, maybe I'm in the right class. And I stayed the whole time even though - even though it was the wrong class, because he was that good. And I did have this moment walking back to my dorm room thinking “if school had been like that, right, growing up if school had been like that through elementary, middle school, high school, like who knows what my life journey would have been. But I think I would have been better off because I definitely would have been more engaged, I would have liked it more. And he, he kind of created this sense of curiosity in me. One class, I'm telling you, it was amazing. He did a card trick. We were all like enthused, and then it went from there. And everything that he said and did was really not about how much he knew, but what he could pull from us. And I felt empowered. And I think that that kind of that, that was the step in the direction of maybe I could do this differently. Maybe I could be a teacher.

(3:00) ALLBRITTON: That's sweet. Yeah. Uh, I've heard from a lot of people that it just takes one professor to make or break a subject. So that's amazing how one professor kind of changed your outlook on education.

(3:12) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah.

(3:16) ALLBRITTON: Um, So. So yeah, definitely. That is interesting. So would you say your professor kind of emphasized more inquiry-based or discovery learning more than your traditional, uh, way that you learned in school as a kid?

(3:29) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that, you know, I'm 46 by the way, so I'm older. Um, and my growing up, we were memorizing answers to problems that had already been solved. And now I think what education is doing and what he kind of instilled in me, even back then, when I was in college, many years ago, was this idea that you know what? We're going to have to teach students inquiry-based, right? Like, we have to get them to look at a problem from all different angles, come up with multiple solutions, um, and answer questions that haven't been answered already. And so that was pretty profound for me, was like, wow, we are really preparing them for jobs that we don't even know what those jobs are. And so they just have to be able to adapt. They've got to learn technology, they have to ask questions, they have to research, right, all of those things that yes, we learned in school, even back in my generation. I just remember a lot of memorization, and it was more about what does the teacher know? And can I remember it? than it was about what am I learning? What am I exploring?

(4:38) ALLBRITTON: Well, that's actually a great segue into the next topic, actually.

(4:41) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Nice.

(4:43) ALLBRITTON: The next uh one being uh what was standardized testing, like when you were a student, and how has it changed?

(4:52) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Okay, well, um, I, the stories are actually better told from what something that my brother did when it came to standardized testing but I can't remember what it's called. But I just remember bubbles, we color in bubbles, right? [unintelligible] it's probably C, I don't know. So um, it was funny because my brother was really brilliant - he passed away, I have to say that cause I talk in past tense, but he was brilliant. He was a great student. But when it came to those standardized tests, he would bubble in a little Christmas tree, he would make a little design. He didn't care at all about the results, which to me was like, "you don't care about the results, like how could you not care?" But he didn't see the purpose in it. And I think that that was very telling of the times, that it really was just about being little puppets on strings. Like, I know, it sounds terrible, but it kind of was. And now, I - I am

a Common Core believer. I know that that's controversial in some places. Um, but I really like this idea of the, you know, the computer-adapted approach where students aren't limited by their Christmas tree, they can actually answer questions and go to another level. Um, and they are really pushing the boundaries rather than the -the educators setting those boundaries for them. Does that make sense? So

(6:10) ALLBRITTON: Definitely.

(6:11) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I think it's, it's much more practical, I've only looked at it from the English and history perspective, so I cannot speak to what it's like for math. But I will say that I like the idea that they have to read multiple texts, and they have to synthesize ideas, and I love that they have to determine if something's credible, like that's real-life stuff, right? Applicable skills for the world we live in. So, I don't love standardized testing. I don't think it's right for every student because we all learn differently, we all can express our understanding differently. But at the same time, it does give us I think, a better gauge than it used to, because we're allowing them to push those boundaries - and asking better questions.

(6:54) ALLBRITTON: Yeah, um, definitely agree, um because we were one of, I believe in junior year, we were - we started taking Common Core. They switched. And I remember English being a lot more uh informational texts over what it used to be and definitely pushing the boundaries. Uh, I do not approve of math, don't get me started on that. But the English, from what I saw, it was, it was amazing. It, it definitely I agree on that.

(7:25) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Fair enough.

(7:26) ALLBRITTON: Yeah. So how would you describe your instructional strategies?

(7:35) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Right now or pre zoom? They've changed so I'll get to that. Okay instructional strategies

(7:41) ALLBRITTON: We could do both.

(7:42) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I mean, obviously, in Southern California, I have to be mindful of second language learners. I have to be mindful of students with, you know, different processing disorders. Um, kids that you know, I work in an engineering school where that's like, the, the curriculum in a lot of classes. Now, obviously, I teach the history, but ultimately, many of these students want to be engineers. Um, and so instructional strategies are SDAIE strategies. If you're familiar with that, does that sound like something you might have learned in a class? Um -

(8:14) ALLBRITTON: No.

(8:15) BROTHER'S TEACHER: okay, that's fine. I mean, just really, really being mindful of teaching vocabulary. Um, I mean, you can even see, like, by my head right there, um, you got to break it down, you need to use visuals for all learners. Probably, you know, like, the Universal Design for Learning is important in what I employ. And I try to give many different ways to show how intelligent we are considering the multiple intelligences, um, because there are some students that, in a classroom setting, if I have a Socratic seminar, may not speak up. But then you hear them in the hallways talking about football or a video game, or is Samsung better than, you know, the iPhone, and you hear them debate. And you can see the level of sophistication in their discourse, right, you can hear it, but you're not always getting that in a classroom when you ask the question. And so I really try to give a lot of different ways to prove you understand something and that you can meet those standards. So my instructional strategies are - they're all over the place. But you know, everything, from Socratic Seminars, to draw this picture, build this, you know, vocabulary, I'm using images or other words, non-examples, you know, just really trying to, like, start here and, and build up to the, you know, to those bigger questions that they can answer that are creative. Does that answer the question?

(9:44) ALLBRITTON: Definitely.

(9:46) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Okay.

(9:47) ALLBRITTON: Yeah, I'm taking your class on reading in the secondary school and definitely vocabulary acquisition is just super important, uh, for just comprehension. So, uh, definitely agree. Uh, how they - would you say that those have changed over time? Or if not, how have they changed during COVID? I know this is a unique time and probably one that we might not see for a while. So I mean

(10:09) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Oh, I hope.

(10:11) ALLBRITTON: Yep.

(10:13) BROTHER'S TEACHER: you know, it was really frustrating at first, because I've got what I call my bag of tricks, right? The things that I know work in a classroom. I've been teaching for 21 years. And on Zoom, it was very difficult to pull the kids out, right, like to get them number one to turn on their video, or participate. Some of the things that I found to be really effective is, again, really making it about them and less about me. Um, pull questions to kind of get them just having an opinion. Um, Nearpod. Have you heard of Nearpod?

(10:45) ALLBRITTON: Yes. Yeah. I am familiar with Nearpod. That has been the go-to.

(10:49) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I love it. Because there's so many different things that they can do with it. And it, it kind of it gives them all an opportunity to express themselves in multiple ways. And it, it did pull them in. It helped a lot. So Nearpod?

(11:02) ALLBRITTON: Yep, uh, definitely been using that. Uh, the drawing feature's pretty good I think.

(11:08) BROTHER'S TEACHER: That's funny.

(11:10) ALLBRITTON: Yeah, it is. It is definitely connecting what you said before about the importance of using visuals for all learners. Um, definitely, especially for students with accommodations. So, um, definitely Nearpod has been a huge help. I've seen it firsthand, so -

(11:30) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Even that informal assessment that you really should be doing the whole way through. Um, I just, you know, I like putting little quiz questions at the end to kind of see what they've learned. I like the collaborative slides where everybody has value and you can like this one, you can like that one. I mean, it kind of brings it back to social media, sort of what they're used to. Um, I just - I appreciate that that has made Zoom better. Now, do I want to be back in a classroom? Doing projects? Hands on stuff? Heck, yeah.

(12:00) ALLBRITTON: Yeah.

(12:01) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I'll wait,

(12:04) ALLBRITTON: Yeah, we'll see. Um, so, what instructional resources do you have access to? Uh maybe through the school or uh through the district?

(12:22) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I mean, Google, right? Like, I have access to everything as well as you do. But um, you know, I mean, there's, there's a lot of great books out there, like formal books that I've read. This is one I wanted to share with you. Because if you really go into this line of work [holds up *Quantum Teaching*], this book is like my Bible, it's phenomenal. Because it really uses the psychology to make lessons stick. And that's hard to do. That's an art. And sometimes it takes many, many years to figure out like, what did you say or do in that moment that they they'll remember forever? It was this book. Um, we have a lot of professional development that is on the agenda of the school district. Sometimes it's useful, sometimes it's not. Um, I mean, I try to have my finger on the pulse of what my students need and if I can't answer the question, if I don't know what's gonna work, I'm loud enough to get answers. You know, I go and seek the answers. And like I said, sometimes it is just some Google research, what are other teachers doing around the nation? Because if you get kind of stuck in your silo in your four walls, um, and you're not reaching out to other educators, you're missing so much. There's a wealth of information out there. So, I know that sounds kind of basic, but really, like, just look it up.

(13:40) ALLBRITTON: Definitely. So, uh, definitely seeing an emphasis on reading, and, uh, in general, just researching where other teachers do - kind of building a community.

(13:53) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah.

(13:55) ALLBRITTON: Um, definitely really important uh to do that outside reading and, uh, getting as many strategies as you can. Uh, we're going to talk a little bit more about professional development later. But, yes, um. And how have, uh, your – uh these instructional resources changed since the beginning of the year? Did you use other things before that? You might - that might be outdated, or, uh, what do you think?

(14:22) BROTHER'S TEACHER: That's, um, that's a good question. Something that maybe would be outdated? I don't know. I mean, I don't know if I've got a good sniffer or what, but you can, you know, sometimes, especially when you're in college, you get a lot of theory, right? And then you go and you do your student-teaching, and you put it into practice, and you go, oh, that didn't work out. Well, um, you know, I think there was a learning curve for that probably the first three years of teaching. I can't really think of something off the top of my head that I was like, oo, that that bombed. Oh, I mean, the district for a little while, was really obsessed with the five-paragraph essay. That's cute. I get the purpose, its structure. Right? Um, but it really stifled good writers. It really prevented their growth. And it was trying to of course appeal and address issues for struggling learners or writers, I should say, but I just - it was so scripted. So I really, um, I tried that for a while because that was the agenda of the district, and I'm an employee of the district. Uh, but I found that that was - was not really going to help them later. Once we get past the topic sentence. Yah dee yah. Conclusion. Where do we go next? Because nobody, even and I'm talking High School, like at high school, we were talking about the five-paragraph essay, and it nearly killed me. So, um, I strayed from some of that. But I had gained a respect for my administration and trust. And I was able to try new things and show them that those strategies were more effective in terms of building up my writers from the class. Um, with social studies, like, I mean, I guess I mentioned the



Socratic Seminar works with some classes, and it's not that effective with others. So you might try something and realize, like, ah, no, not with this audience. I don't know what else, like four corners is fun, like, all those kinds of things they teach you, in your education classes, can work in one situation and fail in another and you just have to be, I think, ready to adapt to that. So all of it is sort of, you know, take it in moderation, and be ready to tailor it to the students in your classroom. Cause I think that's what some, some people forget in education is like, they told me this would work, it should work, I'm going to make it work. Well, they're kids. They're human. And if it's not working, adjust. That's my opinion.

(16:55) ALLBRITTON: Yep, can definitely empathize with the five paragraph essays. They just felt so skeletal, like, definitely what you were saying before about uh the inquiry-based, that kind of student driving the learning. Um, definitely doesn't, uh, compute with that. And,uh, yeah, I've gotten that. Uh, definitely some classes, you can do certain things, and some classes are less talkative, so you can't do this. So it's, you got to take the temperature, you know, decide what you're gonna do.

(17:24) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Exactly. Feel it out. And I think that they're so good at telling you, you know, like, there was one class, like, "we love Kahoot." And I thought, "well, maybe, maybe it's a good use of time for review, or even teachable moments where I'm like, Oh, you know, you knew that. Okay, let's talk about it," um, you know, and then other classes, I'm like, "No, this is really silly. It's not engaging for some of you." So, you know, it, it depends. Got to adapt.

(17:50) ALLBRITTON: Definitely. So, I know that students are going to be coming into the classroom soon in San Diego Unified. So this is kind of fitting. Uh, how has classroom management changed since you were a student?

(18:05) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Since I was a student?

(18:07) ALLBRITTON: Yeah, yeah.

(18:09) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Well, you know, I hate to sound like that old grandma sitting on her porch in a rocking chair and be like, "kids these days." Um, but I think it is different there. It's hard to capture their attention for long, right, the attention span's a little shorter, because if, if you're not as exciting as a YouTube video, like, you're done. So I think in terms of classroom management, my management has always been about rapport. It's always been about creating relationships, not friendships, but relationships. And I just want to be clear about that. Because some, some teachers want to be cool, they want to be like fitting in. So you like video games, I'll play them too. You like to read, you know, anime, me too. That's not my style, it doesn't fit. But I do recognize what's valuable to them, and honor it, you know, in as many ways as I can. Um, so I think that that's kind of, you know, we talked about, like, classical, like, you can, you know, something doesn't go out of style. I think rapport never goes out of style when it comes to classroom management. Um, the students change, for sure. Like, there's stuff that I say, and I realized, wow, that really dated me and they can't relate at all. But, you know, I mean, I really try to get to know them, so that I can use that as leverage, right, their interests, and then I use humor to defuse. I am good at that. I grew up in a fairly dysfunctional family myself. And so I learned quickly, like, I can joke, I can make them laugh and it kind of simmers it down, right, takes the temperature down. Um, so those are like my main methods. Obviously, whatever you say you're going to do, you got to do it. Because if you enter into a power struggle with a teenager, you got to win. Like, this [unintelligible] no joke, because you will, you'll never see the end of that, right? They will realize that they can push that boundary. That was difficult for me in my early 20s. Because I, I wasn't sure of my own boundaries, right? And then I became a mom. And I'm like, "Oh, I'm sure because I don't want my kids acting like this in any sort of setting." So, um, I think that helped. But recognizing, just kind of playing out scenarios in my mind of like, what if the kid does this? I mean, I remember during my student teaching, this kid was six-two, I was teachin' seniors, it was Gov/econ. And I was 24 or something like, I don't know how old you are, but like I was young, just out of, you know, college, essentially, [unintelligible] in the credential program. And he stood up like, it was day one. And the, you know, we

used to call “master teacher”, I know, that's not appropriate now. But like, my um support provider, whatever you call your teachers, a mentor, had said, “you know, I'm just introducing, this is Miss Lawrence at the time, I wasn't married, Miss Lawrence, and she's gonna be taking over this class”, this kid stands up and this was inner city too, I have to kind of explain that because I'm five foot two and a half and white. So you know, I stood out. And he's 6'2. He stands up, and he just flips me off. Gave me the bird. And I was like, Oh, I – I really didn't expect that. I didn't know how to act. Um, and he goes, “You really think you're going to teach us? Please.” And so then I was just thinking to myself very quickly, thank goodness, like, how am I going to address this situation? Because I have to command like, this, this room, right? I've got to look like, I've got some credibility. And I mean, obviously, I told him in so many words to sit down, or he'd go the office, or, you know, he had a couple choices. Um, and then later pulled him aside and said, “Look, I get you don't know me, and I don't know you. But I'm pretty sure you don't want me to judge you based on the way you look. But you did that to me, right? You figured out I'm young. And I'm white. And I'm sure you know, I'm a female, and like, you know, all these stereotypes. I'm like, so why don't we find some common ground real quick and get along?” And we did. But what I realized in that moment is like, they will trigger you. They will push buttons, they will find weaknesses. And they will prey on those weaknesses. And I don't make them just, you know, I know that makes them seem like animals, but to some extent, they're instinctual. And if they think that you don't know what you're gonna do next, that you're not really drivin' that school bus, that metaphorical school bus, you're in trouble. So classroom management needs to come from a place of rapport, confidence, fake it till you make it, I guess. Um, and just recognizing that there have to be boundaries, appropriate boundaries and consequences for pushing those boundaries. And you've got to stay firm. That's, and that's always worked. Like, no matter the learner, no matter if it's 2021, or 2000 - when I started, you know -

(22:55) ALLBRITTON: definitely, you have to, uh, be willing to carry out any kind of any kind, uh, of threat. You can't make empty promises,

(23:04) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Nope

(23:05) ALLBRITTON: Definitely important. Uh, so, uh, how would you say that's changed, though, from your, uh, experience as a student?

(23:18) BROTHER'S TEACHER: From my own experience? I mean, I think

(23:22) ALLBRITTON: Did teachers command the same kind of respect?

(23:25) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah, I think we kind of entered a room feeling that sense of hierarchy or authority, I don't remember ever thinking it would be okay to flip my teacher off. Or, or to even think that my teacher couldn't do their job, right. Like, I never, I don't remember that in me. But I have respect for my parents and probably a healthy fear. So you know, and I, in terms of like, remembering classmates, you know, it was it was the teachers way. Now, there was a science teacher who had a chair out in the hallway for me on occasion. I was social. So my science teacher didn't appreciate that about me and put me out in the hallway quite often. So I think that there were always consequences, right? And mostly was just like, you're out of here. There wasn't any sort of restorative justice or you know, the things that we talked about now that it really changed in education, it was the teacher's way or no way. And they will tell your parents.

(24:32) ALLBRITTON: Great. Um, so, kind of answers uh, one of the questions, uh, before, but if you just want to restate, uh. Oh, actually, this one's a little bit different. What types of professional development have you participated in and what is your perception of professional development in general?

(24:52) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Um, I have a positive perspective or perception when they are modeling what they're asking us to do, does that make sense? So sometimes you go to professional development, and it's all blah, blah, blah, but they want you to be creative, or they want you to engage the kids in these certain sort of activities, but they're talking at you, right? They're not, they're not modeling it, they're not having you practice it. Like, [sound effect] that's what I think about that. But, um, that'll be

funny in the recording. Anyway, I think that the most effective professional development in my, you know, opinion is when I get to try it out in a safe place, which is also true of the students, right? Like, how do we learn? I've got to be able to feel safe, to try this, to fail, to get some feedback, right? Make some corrections, revisions, whatever you want to call it, and try again. And that's the best professional development. Um, I, oh, what is her name? Dr. Kate Kin- Kinseth, it was on the top of my head. But then does that sound – Kinsella? Kate Kinseth or Kinsella. [noise]. She does a lot of really incredible work for um long-term English learners, which is probably an issue that you would have in Texas, and definitely an issue that we have in Southern California. Um, students have come here, they're even second generation. So like, their parents came here, and now they've been in school in America their whole lives. They're really not progressing in their reading and writing. Um, and obviously, that was an issue for me as an English teacher, but it's still an issue for me as history, right? Or social sciences. They don't have the vocabulary. Her work really helped me figure out how to get them past that learning hurdle, to where they [unintelligible] read and write at grade level instead of looking like they're fourth graders on paper. And even though they had been here all their lives, right, that's kind of one of those things you're like, “why are you stagnating?” and they were stagnating because we weren't addressing their specific needs. Repetition, active language, right, allowing access to that, you know, I don't know, dialect of privilege, honestly, um, that was important, because I think for a long time, the idea was okay, if they're an English learner, simplify. Simplify your language. Use a picture. That was the best you got. And with her work, and it's killing me, because I'm, she's like, amazing, and I can't remember her name properly. I'm gonna look it up in a sec. But, um, with her work, there was a lot of talk about, no, you don't, you don't simplify like that to the point of dumbing it down, or watering it down. What you do is practice. You practice, practice, practice access to new vocabulary every day in a variety of ways. You make it safe. Um, sentence starters, you know, things like that, to help them get going. Um, so like in writing, I'm trying to think of an example. But it'd be like, you know, um, I maintain and to - to show them how to bring in a claim, right, I maintain, I argue, um -

(28:01) ALLBRITTON: I think blank is that - I think blank because stuff like that or different -,

(28:05) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, and I first thought like, "Oh, well, they're just like plugging in stuff." Right? It seems weird, actually, I had a lot of success with it with your brother because he has really profound ideas, right? But he didn't know how to structure in a way. And he didn't really know how to use that sort of academic language. And so it was at first plug and chug, right? Fill in the blank, the teacher's happy. But then have him read it back, then you have 'em dissect it. And we'll highlight your claim, highlight your evidence, highlight your reasoning, so they start to understand what they were actually doing. And eventually the language becomes their own. And it's so exciting.

(28:46) ALLBRITTON: I bet. It's a huge challenge, but -

(28:49) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Hold on. I have to grab this book because if I don't get her name, right, I should be fired. Mmmm, maybe it's not even gonna tell me here. No. Dr. Kate Kinseth. That's what I – [unintelligible] Kinsella. It's Kinsella. I'll go with my gut on that one, because it's obviously not in the book. Anyway, really, really interesting work that she's done. And hopefully you come across that in your courses.

(29:22) ALLBRITTON: Great. Um, how has, uh, school curriculum changed since you become a teacher? I know it's been a while but how has it changed? Especially in the history? I think it's changed a lot.

(29:34) BROTHER'S TEACHER: It's changed a lot. I'm grateful. Um, I had a great, another great professor too at San Diego State - history teacher - and he was all about the essential question. I don't know that he labeled it then that back then. But the essential question of just kind of putting out that question that is going to to just, you know, kind of guide the whole discussion or inquiry and then at the end revisiting that. And with the hopes that students can answer it, and even if they have multiple answers, right, like variety of answers still being able to address that question. And so there was um, gosh, a unit of study where he just had us writing questions all the time. We would be learning something in history. And he'd

say, Okay, what, what open-arching questions can you ask? And that's what we did. And then later, I was like, "Oh, they call that essential questions." Right? Um, that was pretty good. Trying to remember which question you asked me, can you tell me what number because I lost track of where I was,

(30:34) ALLBRITTON: we're on, uh, eight.

(30:35) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Okay. So curriculum?

(30:37) ALLBRITTON: Yeah, curriculum.

(30:38) BROTHER'S TEACHER: So I work at a what's called a Linked Learning School, which really focuses on project-based learning. And pre COVID, we were doing a lot of projects. So we don't have any sort of canned curriculum, if that makes sense. There isn't like, they don't hand you a binder and say, "here you go. Teach this class." Um, we're creating our own. And in that process, it kind of, you know, ignites my creativity, which is exciting. It allows me to really address the needs of my specific audience, my students, um, and then it allows me to - encourages me to link it to college and career, link it to my other teachers who are teaching content, different content. Um, so, you know, when you say curriculum, like I think they're in some places, teachers are handed a binder, and they're said, this is this is what you teach. But that's really never been the case for me. I've never been in a school that does that. Teachers design their own curriculum based on the standards, of course, and based on the learning targets.

(31:43) ALLBRITTON: Definitely.

(31:44) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah. I think it's evolved with me, right? Because if I'm creating it,

(31:49) ALLBRITTON: Yeah, definitely. [unintelligible] So, moving on, uh, what is the role of the parent in education and how has it shifted during your career?

(32:06) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I started at a high school, then I went to a middle school, then I was back [unintelligible] high school. You definitely see a change. I think in high school parents back off

significantly, maybe, to the point of the student's demise, quite frankly. But, um, I think in some cultures, even, there, they consider their student grown, right, you're grown, you do what you need to do. And the parents really aren't involved. I kind of like a team approach, student, teacher, parent kind of approach. Um, because I don't think they should be left to their own devices quite yet. Uh, some of them are ready, some of them you know, like my own son, very focused, very driven, I don't have to micromanage him, I don't need to check his grades, like he tells me. And it's true. It's honest. That's not all kids. In fact, it's a little bit of a, a minority. And so, I think that parents should be more involved. I saw that a little bit better at the middle school. Um, it was a - it was a rough neighborhood. And so some parents were pretty busy working multiple jobs, didn't have the time or even the - their own educational experience to draw on to help their students. Um, so I guess a lot of times, I felt like I'm flying solo, you know, that I don't have that team with the parent and the student, just me and the student. And that's where rapport becomes even more important. Some of them even call me "mom." And I think in some of you maybe your psychology class, it's a - "mmm, is that an inappropriate boundary?" But I am kind of like their mom now, you know, because I'm asking, you know, "did you eat? Did you do this? Did you finish your homework?" Like I'm, I'm up in their hula hoop. So, um, I think, you know, I would like to see a little bit more parent involvement. We've been fairly unsuccessful at this school to get that to happen. I'm not sure why. It seems almost like it's off limits. Parents don't show up even for, you know, events. So, I, I would assume they're busy. It's not because they don't love their kid. But they -

(34:08) ALLBRITTON: Definitely

(34:08) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I - [unintelligible] maybe I mean, on a positive note, it could be because they trust us. I don't know. You could look at it a lot of different ways. But it'd be nice if they were more involved.

(34:19) ALLBRITTON: So you'd say that that's been a trend over time? It's been a little bit less involvement over time?



(34:24) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Mhm. Yeah. And one of the things, I don't want to sound negative, but you know, COVID and students being at home and parents feeling like they're the teacher now I think has opened some people's eyes to what it is that we really do and what makes us qualified and what makes us effective. Um, I mean, my own friends have you know, "Oh, I can't, Why am I teaching, they don't listen." I'm like, mhm. I'm like it takes a little bit more than just "I'm going to tell you to do this and then you do it." That's pretty ineffective for a lot of teenagers. So they're almost wired to rebel, right? Like -

(35:00) ALLBRITTON: Oh, yeah. Speak from experience.

(35:06) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I think – Oh I'm sure there's some good stories there.

(35:10) ALLBRITTON: Yup, so

(35:13) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Did I – I think I answered the question. I don't know -

(35:15) ALLBRITTON: Yes, you did. You did.

(35:16) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Okay. Okay.

(35:18) ALLBRITTON: Great. Uh, next, uh, just kind of reflective on the future. So what do you see as an aspect of education that needs to be adjusted?

(35:27) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Hmm. I'm really proud of what our school does in terms of, um, making sure that all doors are open. So talking about apprenticeship programs, military, college, going straight into career, I I'm a believer of that. When I was growing up in school, actually high school, there was a fork in the road, and you went to what was called "votec," if you want to be like an auto mechanic, or working construction, or whatever, um, or you're going the college path. And clearly I chose the college path. But I think that there's a lot of opportunities out there that many schools just don't explore. They don't explore with students, they're not aware of those opportunities. We often use in education fear tactics, like, if you don't do this, if you don't pass this class, if you don't master this subject, you're gonna

fail in life. And I – I don't know [unintelligible] that's really true, right? Like, and they can - they're real quick, with exceptions are like, “Oh, yeah, but what about this YouTuber who makes like, more money than you'll ever see in your life,” and I'm like, [unintelligible], we understand that not everybody's gonna play in the NFL. And, right, like, not everybody's gonna be a famous YouTuber, all that, but I really believe in like, let's – let's go ahead, and let's explore that. So what would that mean? You know, what would your lifestyle look like? What would it - What would it require for you to make it to that end goal, and not necessarily use as many of the fear [unintelligible], so that's something I like to see change a little bit in school, like, more, you know, be inclusive, like, everybody's got good ideas. Figure, figure out what's gonna work. But more importantly, know, I don't know how everyone's going to be successful. I can't possibly say, I mean, I've seen people spend all kinds of money to go get the college degree, and then they don't even end up working in that career. And, and yet, they're still successful, but like, they were following this rigid path, that didn't allow for them to explore anything else, any other passions, or interests or options, and they got stuck. And then they just had a bunch of student debt. You know, like, who am I to say, “you're gonna fail in life if you don't pass this class or master this content?” You know.

(37:41) ALLBRITTON: Definitely. Um, just being more open to what the student wants, instead of what you want [unintelligible] think is definitely important. Um, this might also - this is also pretty neat question, please describe, uh, the most important educational experience that you've had.

(38:00) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Hmm. Like in my own education?

(38:02) ALLBRITTON: Uh, I think, uh, that as a teacher, or as a student would be fine, just at any point, education in general.

(38:10) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Okay. Well, I guess me sharing this that pivotal moment of seeing that a professor could be engaging and that it wasn't going to be them professing and me soaking it up, like the sponge. Um, but that, my, my ideas were valuable and validated. Um, that was pretty pivotal. And then in terms of being a teacher, you know, sometimes we, at a project-based learning school, we give them a

task that in m-, in the back of my head, I'm not even sure we can figure out the answer to but I'm kind of excited to see what happens and I have always been surprised, positively surprised by what students come up with. Um, we were engaging in one of them was, um, writing a Climate Action Plan. And at first they literally "that's so boring," I'm like, but it's never been done at a high school like let's do this. Let's see what happens. And we talked to you know, people at the mayor's office about San Diego's you know, Climate Action Plan and what does it you know, really require and so we wanted to kind of look at theirs - this sort of an anchor text in the sense of like, Okay, well obviously our school in San Diego should be in alignment with theirs so already we're looking and analyzing complex text, but, but it was worth something right? Like, at the end of the day, they were doing something that hadn't been done before and it was very challenging, like awful, but but good, awful, like, it gets so messy. And if you can be okay with the mess, students will always surprise you. It's so exciting.

(39:44) ALLBRITTON: That's awesome. Uh, I've seen a few of those. It's really cool when you get to kind of, um, interact with the system, uh especially with the mayor's office, especially going local. I know they're always open to students kind of getting in the swing of things and exploring kind of their future maybe opportunity. So

(40:04) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah

(40:05) ALLBRITTON: Definitely sounds really cool.

(40:06) BROTHER'S TEACHER: The last one that we started doing was, and that's the thing like what you're saying. I mean, there's a lot of companies that are excited to do that kind of work. In fact, I was surprised. Um, I approached this one company, Solar Turbines. Yeah, they're basically solar turbines? I don't know, there's no other term. [Unintelligible] They're like, stationary, but they collect the sun, they store the sun's energy, also the wind, you can, you know, so they already had a design, and they wanted to sell us a kit so that our engineering students could [sound effect], like, do the Legos, right, put it together. I was like, Listen, no disrespect your design's, amazing. But wouldn't it be kind of interesting to

get feedback from the students about how they could innovate some parts, and maybe even improve upon the design? And I, I figured that they would just end the meeting right there, like, “what do you think you are?” Um, but actually, they were open to it. And they said, “You know what, that would be kind of interesting.” I said we don't necessarily want to purchase your kit, we can manufacture the parts here, actually, we have that capability. But I just think it'd be really interesting for the students to kind of dissect, right, and figure out what is necessary and how it could be better. Now, not every company is open to that, because there's [unintelligible] involved. But they were and it was really cool. And -

(41:28) ALLBRITTON: Why not?

(41:28) BROTHER'S TEACHER: And students were competing for, you know, kind of like bragging rights, like this company is impressed by our design. And they think that this could actually work. And then they built it to see does it really work? And it does.

(41:42) ALLBRITTON: That's, that's so cool.

(41:43) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah, so that's fun stuff. Like, that's, that's bold, right? You have to be like really open to students coming up with answers. And I think as you know, a teacher in my 20s that's, that scared me. It really did. Because they're talking to each other. They're moving around the room, they're exploring on the internet, like, what are they doing? You know, and so you have to build that trust, that relationship with them, where there's accountability built in, but kind of putting out this thing of like, “this has never been done before. You want to try it?” Most of the time the answer for them is yes. Because it's meaningful. They [unintelligible] walk away from a worksheet or a textbook any day and feel no guilt. But if you give them something that's interesting, you know, that's going to kind of give them some marketable skills. They feel that and they respect that.

(42:35) ALLBRITTON: It's awesome. Been missing out.

(42:40) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Mhm.

(42:41) ALLBRITTON: But, yeah, um, so the next question, uh, what are the most dominant trends you see in th- education today? And what do you see in the future?

(42:52) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Dominant trends. Um, I mean, I really see in education, this pendulum, just [whistle] extremes, I would love for us to kind of get somewhere in the middle. And so for a while it was, we had a California High School Exit Exam, you could not, even if you had passed all your classes with, you know, whatever passing grades, um, you would gotten the ATG credits, like all of these things, even if you had jumped through all these flaming hoops already, you still couldn't get a high school diploma unless you pass this test. And the test was junk, in my opinion, okay. But like some people wrote it, and they were proud, but anyway I – I thought it was trash. And so it was very difficult to be on that side of the pendulum where this standardized test meant everything, it meant everything, nothing else mattered. Now, that went away. And then we swing over here. And right now, um, oh, don't get me fired. But right now, it's, it's a lot of restorative justice practices, which i-, that's great. It really is great. It's like kids trying to figure out problems, and I'm all about that. But there are some policies that our particular school district has put into place where kids can turn in late work, like for months, and get full credit. And so you go from this, like, really strict, everything matters with this standardized test to loosey goosey over here, of like, turn it in, if you know redo it, I mean, I like - I like a culture of revision. Don't get me wrong. I think that's essential in life to like -

(44:29) ALLBRITTON: Mhm.

(44:30) BROTHER'S TEACHER: you know, really do well. But mercy, turning in stuff like due dates don't matter? You know, quality is real subjective. Um, we're kind of at that place, and it would be fun if we were more in the middle. So yeah, I hope the future of education is balance. But I got 10 more years so we'll see what happens. I haven't burned out yet, and I have been ridin' that pendulum back and forth? So -

(45:03) ALLBRITTON: So would you say from what, from what I say when you say a balance and a pendulum, it's more of, uh, the teacher getting that? Do you think that – as in the teacher has, like, control? Because when you say, or is it just in the way you treat student work? What do you th-, what do you mean?

(45:22) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I think it's, it's district mandates, you know, I think educators in general have a pretty good feel about what balance would be in their classroom. You want to, obviously have high expectations, you wanna scaffold so that students can reach those even at first if it seems overwhelming, um, appropriate boundaries. And, and but you can, you can be too strict to the point of not being inclusive. Right? So there's, that's what I'm trying to say is like, the district mandates, you know, at first it was all about teach to this test, because they can't have a diploma, if they can't pass this test, regardless of the quality of the test, um, to this other side of, you know, of the, of the, you know, the other side of things where it's, whatever. You come down, teach 'em, you know, you might think this is good, somebody else doesn't, you know, like, what are the standards? They're, they're big questions. Now, they're not necessarily as guiding as they once were, you know, um, if you have discipline problems, have the peers work it out together. Sometimes you need to say, you know what, that is wrong, you are not doing that or saying that in this room. And sometimes you do want to kind of build this conversation, this community of conversation about what happened. You know, I don't know, I think, I think it can't be one or the other.

(46:50) ALLBRITTON: Definitely, I understand. Uh, so what you're talking about is definitely, uh, you don't want to be too loose with students. And I've seen the seen this during COVID. And I'm wondering if, like you said, it's going to be like a pendulum, right, you're gonna after COVID whether people are gonna look at, uh, what districts have been doing and go, alright, we need to scale this back, but not all the way or whether they'll be too reactionary and go too far. But that'd be definitely something to look forward, especially in this coming year, I think.

(47:23) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yeah, I mean, when you're touching on is the politics, right? There's so much politics in education, because we're paid generally with taxpayer dollars, right. And people have gone through the system themselves. So when they're out of the system, they think it should be the way it was when they were there, or it's not as good. Right. There's a lot of um perspectives like that. And, and yeah, I think that in education, we do tend to be reactionary, because it's not necessarily unlike politicians. We're trying to appeal to the public and hope they don't choose charter or private, right? Like, we're still a thing, we're public education, please see us as something good. And if they don't, if our clientele doesn't like what we're doing, we are quick to change it without even knowing if it was working. Right. And that bugs me, because like I said, I've been ridin' - riding that train. So, you know, I hope that we can really focus in, zoom in on researched-based approaches, and maybe value teachers more, value what they think is working in a classroom with their particular students. That'd be great.

(48:37) ALLBRITTON: Definitely, uh, teachers in the system know the best, uh, methods and strategies instead of people who have kind of graduated out of that system is what I think you're trying to get at. Um -

(48:51) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Yes

(48:52) ALLBRITTON: Definitely. So, uh, so we've gotten to the end of the interview, there's one last question that I want to ask just before, uh, we finish the interview is just: is there anything else that you'd like to add?

(49:06) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Um, I mean, just what I would tend to say to a student teacher, anyone who's thinking about going into this, this career, it's fantastic. But it better be a calling, if you know what I'm saying. Like, you got to feel compelled, drawn to it, because it's hard. And you're gonna have resistance every which way. You know, whether it be from parents or students or even sometimes your colleagues when you have a new idea or administration. I mean, I'm telling you, like, you can't, can't worry about being liked, you know, um, and so I think that that's really important. I think also recognizing

that you teach students, not content. Content is secondary. So if you – I, I, I've met some people, this is why I feel like I should say this to all young people going into this career, but you know, I've met people that love literature. Your mom and her books, right, like, who love literature or love history, right? And maybe Chinese history, like, who knows, but they have their passions. And they think like, “you know what, I'm gonna go into a classroom, and I'm just gonna share that love and they're gonna soak it up and feel that too.” That's not how that works.

(50:18) ALLBRITTON: Nope.

(50:18) BROTHER'S TEACHER: So, you can love your content, but really, you're there to teach kids and you're there to teach them whatever they need to be taught. And so this whole like, “yeah, but that's not my job” kind of attitude is not how it works. Right? And so, I think some people do go into it very disappointed like, “but I love literature or, I love my content, and they don't seem to love it back.” Yeah.

(50:43) ALLBRITTON: Yeah. It's gonna [unintelligible] -

(50:44) BROTHER'S TEACHER: So what are you gonna do? You got to be, you know, you got to build these relationships with kids.

(50:51) ALLBRITTON: Sweet.

(50:51) BROTHER'S TEACHER: I – I think that's, yeah, that's the extent of it. You know, I wish you the best of luck, I hope. I do hope that you go into this line of work. I think it's been a lot of joy for me, a lot of really fun relationships. And I said something on Facebook yesterday about siphoning energy out of them. Because I'm so tired. I'm so so stupid, tired right now. But I come into this room. And I serve, right, like, that's my job is to serve. And it feels good every day. And it's always different. And I would imagine, like, I'm a contractor's daughter, and I know that my dad can drive past buildings and be like, “I built that.” Right? Well, I just look at students, former students even and hear their stories and realize “I built



that. I was a part of that” and it's really fulfilling. So hope you give it a strong consideration, but I hope it's a calling. Otherwise, go a different way.

(51:49) ALLBRITTON: Sweet. Thank you so much [BROTHER'S TEACHER]. I really appreciate the interview and have a great, have a great day.

(51:55) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Absolutely. Nice to meet you, James.

(51:57) ALLBRITTON: Thank you.

(51:57) BROTHER'S TEACHER: Bye-bye.

(51:58) ALLBRITTON: Bye.