

Interview with Mrs. Vinessa Parker
Saturday, October 17, 2020 at 10:30 a.m. (CST)
Interviewer: Andrew Jimenez

Andrew: Alright. Can you hear me?

Vinessa: Yes, and it's showing record too, so hopefully that means it's actually recording.

Andrew: Perfect. It sounds like it is then. Awesome. Okay, well then let's try this. Thank you so much for agree - uh sorry - agreeing to meet with me today. I am Andrew Jimenez, here with, uh, Mrs. Parker, Mrs. Vinessa Parker. Uh, it is eleven, about ten thirty actually on Saturday, October seventeenth, 2020. We are over a Zoom meeting from Texas to Florida. I also, I want to clarify that I am going to record this interview; it will be, uh, it will be uploaded to the UD oral history repository. Is that alright with you, Mrs. Parker?

Vinessa: Yes, it is. I'm good with that.

Andrew: Um, alright. So, let's go ahead and begin with uh our first question. So uh I wanted to first start off with kind of your educational background ,uh, growing up. While you were growing up, how were you educated? How would you describe your experience?

Vinessa: Well, I would put it in two parts. One, I was formally educated. I went to elementary, middle school, and high school. All in the public school. Uh kind of what you would consider a rural school. Um because I grew up on a couple hundred acres, so I rode the bus everyday and went to a public high school. It was very, uh, close family type of atmosphere. A lot of those people had known each other forever. That type of thing. But I also would say informally, my mom was a very ,um, avid reader. My dad was too until he passed away, but they both read a lot. My mom was very much a communicator. We talked a lot. Um, she would listen to a lot of the things I wrote. We would have a lot of discussions, and I feel like that was a huge part of my education because it wasn't all just sitting in the classroom feeling like I was being taught. Um the other thing was um did a lot of, um, oh-- I'm getting my hot tea. My husband is wonderful. That's part of being a teacher too. Thank you.

And then I also, um, went to Sunday school a lot, I went to church. We didn't have a library I really went to or anything like that to do group type things, but I did go to church a lot, so I feel like there was a lot of education there just in sitting - learning to sit in a group listening to learning and how to respond, so I consider all of that a part of my education.

Andrew: Okay. Perfect. Uh now where did you learn how to teach?

Vinessa: Um technique-wise, um, obviously in the classroom learning on the go but a lot of it was - and still is kind of my philosophy - I like to learn from other teachers. I don't have anything against formal education and going to school to get a Phd. or a Doctorate or any that stuff. But I have found when I have my choice, I go to other teachers. Teachers that have been in the classroom for a long time or teachers that um after watching them teach, I think, "Okay, I want to emulate that style."

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: That's how I learned how to teach. Uh also as a Christian, I do believe a lot of it is just a God-given thing that you constantly - first of all - enjoy talking and interact- interaction, communication. But I believe some of that is God-given in the little things, the intangibles. So, I think that's kind of where I learned.

Andrew: Okay. So like having a natural ability - there's some of that - but also learning from other people who have done it before.

Vinessa: Oh, definitely. And, like I say, I'm I'm really fanatical that people - I am one that if I take a workshop, I want someone who has been in the classroom. Not that professors aren't in the classroom, but it's definitely really different working with middle schoolers and high schoolers every day versus teaching about it.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: You know, talking about it. Maybe you haven't really been in the classroom and had to teach - um - day to day process is huge. You know, because that's the challenges of teaching, so, um, that's where I learned to teach, I guess.

Andrew: Okay, very nice. So uh yeah uh so people who have like experience in the classroom - you want that experience from them.

Vinessa: Oh yeah, definitely. Especially when it's a daily thing.

Andrew: Yeah. Now this kind of - it kind of touches upon that question too, but uh what experience if any has prepared you to become a teacher. So it sounds like you, you've done workshops and learned from other teachers. Would you like to add any more that has helped you along the way?

Vinessa: Um - I think I was always had an inclination to it. Um, I liked when - when I was younger - I always liked to work in the nursery and I always liked to work with the younger kids and do vacation Bible schools and things like that. Um when we became - you know - when I first got married we were youth leaders.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um so that was kind of interesting just learning from teenagers what they thought of their classes and of their teachers. Even though I really never thought I'd be a teacher - uh - and the I did when my boys were young - I had several children that I kept in my home and just um I feel like all of that is a combined thing in being a teacher -

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Having a heart towards kids um but also understanding - seeing them learn.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um so I think all of that kind of contributed to my becoming a teacher as far as experience.

Andrew: Okay - very cool. Well that actually - so uh -the next section that I wanted to talk about is kind of an introduction, uh, to becoming a teacher uh so you said uh that you didn't grow up expecting to be a teacher. When did you decide - or when did you realize that you wanted to be a teacher?

Vinessa: Um, probably the years that I kept kids in my home and um - I had a good friend come over and he knew me for a long time since high school - he and his wife came over and we were sitting at the table and he said, "You know, you just can't help but constantly teach, can you?" And it really dawned on me, and I said, "What do you mean?" and he said, "You're always explaining." He said, "But you've always been like that - you just always explain. You want everybody to see things and understand things more than just - you know - passing chit-chatting knowledge or whatever. You really want them to get it." And he said, "That's, you know, have you really thought about you oughta do this."

And when I was little, I used to torture my sister and make her- you know- I was the teacher and she was the student. And I always -- that I never thought of it as a profession.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um and that was just - you know - why would you want to be a teacher? Was my attitude. Um and then after being around kids so much - and especially after he said that, I thought, 'Well, maybe it is a talent to be able to uh uh want to constantly do that and show people things and explore things.' So that's when I considered that.

Andrew: Ah - that's really cool. So that seed was planted then. Nice.

Vinessa: Yeah.

Andrew: Um so as far as where you teach today - where where do you currently teach?

Vinessa: I teach at North Florida Christian School. Um and that is in Tallahassee, Florida, which is kind of cool 'cause it's in the capital city so a lot of different influences there.

Andrew: Mhmm. And is that where you started off teaching, too?

Vinessa: No, I taught in Tampa at a place called Temple Heights Christian. And I taught there three years. And I actually started my very first year I taught pre-school.

Andrew: Oh- okay.

Vinessa: And yeah which was kind of interesting. And my administrator came to me and I said, "You know I I enjoy it but I think that I want more of a challenge because I like - I like this." And she said, "I'll be honest with you I was going to talk with you about moving you to the upper grades." Uh because I did have a degree and I did have the certifications and stuff like that, and she said, "Why don't you consider teaching older kids?" And I was really intimidated teaching high school 'cause they're teenagers and, you know, they don't always do exactly what they're told -or whatever. And she said, "Honestly." She said, "If you love 'em, you'll be fine because that's what'll come through so you'll be able to challenge them." So I thought, 'That's a good idea.'

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And um I started it and I really enjoyed it and really there's that's the biggest thing is making sure that they know you love them, your ground rules are set, and you can share with them.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So

Andrew: Okay.

Vinessa: That's...

Andrew: So uh during these days - so you started off teaching kindergarten. What do you teach these days?

Vinessa: Uh right now - because we're a private school - we can - because I intersperse between middle school and high school um also, I'll mention I did take three years off. I taught 4 years and then the last three years I worked with my husband. And then I've come back into teaching - I've taught online that whole time.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: but one of the things that - well tell me the question again. Let me think how I want to phrase this while you're saying it again. Haha

Andrew: Yeah. No, I was just asking you uh what you teach these days.

Vinessa: Okay, well, I teach - although it's not necessarily my preference - but I teach um 7th grade world history. So I'm back in the middle school that way. And then I teach high school - I teach um American history honors. I teach a Bible class, which has some historical aspects to it. Then I also am covering an online class where the kids are online and they do Florida virtual, so I don't know if that's really teaching - that's more monitoring.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I teach our own online classes to our academy. And then I do yearbook. SO, it's kind of a weird mixture. SO, I'm not really sure which classes you're asking about but that's what I do all day.

Andrew: No, that's perfect. That is- that is what I was asking. So yeah, that kind of kind of a large spread of different different things. That's cool. Um so as far as your teaching experience um and kind of those early years, uh what were your first years of teaching like?

Vinessa: Uh, well, I go back to my teaching in Tallahassee because that really um is where I've been mostly, but even in my first years, probably the biggest thing the classes were bigger, my class sizes were bigger at that point, um, the other thing too - I can remember feeling like it was literally like drinking from a firehose. There were so many expectations, um, just not - cause I kind of had this idea that it would just be OK you go in the classroom and you teach and it's find and you do a little bit of grading papers and then of course all the extra stuff that I don't think people realize happens. Um, also, I was really involved when I got to Tallahassee our band needed someone to coordinate our Majorettes and the Colorguard and I did a lot of that. Um, I went on a lot of school trips when I started. And so, it was a lot. Uh, in addition to, in of course, compared to schools Tampa did not require nearly the paperwork, the interaction with the parents that the school in Tallahassee did. So, that was a real learning curve for me, and I just remember sometimes just being overwhelmed.

Andrew: Yeah.

Vinessa: The first few years, which I think all teachers are--

Andrew: I can definitely say that was my experience, too.

Vinessa: Yeah, sure.

Andrew: Haha. Um, so what would you say would be one of your biggest successes -- either during those first few years or along the way during your teaching career?

Vinessa: So, the first few years probably the couple of things the biggest successes um...we did a thing when my kids I had eleventh grade American History and I think I had two sections, maybe three, in Tallahassee when I first started. Really loved that class, but what really was a cool project, so I loved doing big projects, I loved involving the students -- still do -- when I can.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But we did a thing on the civil war, and I had kids that had a particular interest in it, 2 or 3 of them, so I said OK why don't we divide up the civil war into categories, like there's the strategies in battles, there's what they wore, there's the role of the different, you know, the Northerners, the Southerners, the slaves, those kind of things, England, France, how they played

a role in it, other countries, this kind of thing. So we divided it up, um, and then I said, you know, they were so excited about it, and so one day I said you know it's a shame that you're not sharing this with anybody, that we're talking about it but we're not sharing it. So I said why don't we do this -- I went down to the elementary and our sixth graders also studied the civil war, so I came back to the high school students and I said why don't we break this down a little bit and find ways to present it and we'll invite them up to you know the big school where we are and we'll present it. So, I have a couple of modules that I worked out of, one was mine and one was the one next to me, so I got permission to use those and we transformed those rooms. We put maps up, we put pictures up, and they they acted the kids got into it we actually had a student whose dad was a reenactor--

Andrew: Oh, cool!

Vinessa: and distinctly owned, like genuine their family, you know, they did one of these historical traces of their ancestry so they actually had relatives on both sides of the war who owned actual uniforms. And they brought those in and that was the only scary part because I thought Lord don't let anything happen to these uniforms, you know!

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: so but what was really cool was the kids were able to explain different things about it and they would the younger kids got to go back and forth between the two modules and they gave them a little bit of food like the Johnnycakes they gave them cornbread but they talked to them about the food they had and let them drink out of these little canteens and I mean it was just really hands-on and probably what was really cool about that was when those six graders finally got me in the eleventh grade five years later, there were some who had stayed the whole time and they were so excited about that and they remembered that. Um, and that was cool. The other thing that we did that I really loved was um I don't know if you remember the show the amazing race, I think it's still on.

Andrew: I remember that!

Vinessa: Loved that show! And we actually set it up where, you know, I got some parents involved and we set it up where they went to different places. Um, and they went around campus and they had to do games along the track and they were all related to what they studied. Um, and probably the coolest part of that, um, was going into the module where they had to do dance moves from the 20s and 30s.

Andrew: laughs

Vinessa: um, and then I had one more and I know I'm taking forever here but this is so fun! We, the school that we're at now, we put out some pretty high athletes. They play, like they're playing right now, they play on Saturdays kind of kids. Some have gone to the NFL, we just

signed our first you know baseball players, they get out of high school making millions, it's amazing. But anyway, so we have a lot of athletes, and part of the problem I was always seeing and I kind of figured out my first few years are there was a real disconnect between the athletic kids and the kids who were not athletes.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: When the truth is, they, you know, they're gonna have to live together in the real world at some point. So, what I did was I got the band director and I said would you mind just you know if I bring my kids in and it was an it was a all boy class, predominantly athletes, but I said would you mind if I bring them in and you talk to them, cause our band director was just a really cool guy, and I said would you mind talking to them and going through it because we were doing jazz in the 1920s. We want them to get it, the con *unable to hear* so rooted in that, and we went in and we had some of the band kids in there, and we had them, and he just interacted those kids and talked about music and played and that was probably one of the coolest things I ever I learned really young that kids have a lot in common, they just don't know it because they're so in their worlds. So, that was cool. When I kinda got ahold of that and I first started teaching, it opened up being able to open more projects like that.

Andrew: Yeah.

Vinessa: Ok, I'm finished now.

Andrew: Ah, no, no, no. No, I like hearing--

Vinessa: Teachers like to talk!

Andrew: Haha! No, I love hearing these stories. I actually remember, um, I never got to do your Amazing Race, but I remember uh when I was in middle school seeing that happening uh like that was the thing everyone was actually looking forward to within uh, within uh our class actually. So, it made it, it made an impact even for the younger grades, that's really cool. Um, as far as, so we just talked about your biggest success or a couple of your biggest successes. Um, what have been some of your biggest challenges perhaps along the way? That can be, uh, during you first years of teaching or perhaps some things that have happened along the way that you've had to adjust with .

Vinessa: Probably the biggest challenge for me was always mostly I was thinking mostly young in terms of starting teaching, the biggest challenge there was also always parent meetings.

Andrew: Mmhm.

Vinessa: Um, and I think those can even continue to be a challenge, it's been interesting being gone three years and now coming back, but I find that again to be a challenge, although it's different when you're older and you've had kids. Now my kids have gone through college and

they have degrees and those kind of things. Um, I think the first years of teaching those were the biggest challenge, um, and I was very blessed to have a woman who gave me a lot of advice about how to handle it, and an administrator who, you know, he constantly talked about parent meetings, because it's so intimidating, especially the young teachers.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, they look young you know which is awesome, but it can be very intimidating because instantly you're talking to a parent you know first of all there are parents and a lot of our younger teachers haven't had children yet.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So it's, you know, all of a sudden they're being attacked a lot of times, and they don't know why, you know. It's like I didn't do anything! And I think, really that was my biggest challenge was learning how to handle those parents and do it in a loving way.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, you know, like I said that, when I think the biggest challenge in teaching, that was it way more than the students. The students were not it. Um, the other thing I think just as and I don't know maybe jumping ahead in my notes here, um but the other thing I think for teachers is the challenge of staying connected, especially when you teach high school almost more than middle school, although it can happen there too. I would go to like my husband with his job we always had Christmas parties, we would do traveling, a lot of international traveling and stuff too

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But it was sometimes being in a group of adults, you find their conversation is very different than what you're used to on a daily basis.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Not, you know, you may be not as tuned in to the adult world as you are into the kid world, and I used to find that to be very challenging, it's like, how do you do both?

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: Because there's, you know, school is so consuming, even teachers that I would not consider great teachers, school is still consuming.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: You know, if you're doing the bare minimum. So, sometimes it would be awkward to go in those situations where you feel like okay, you know, you're wanting to talk about the most recent stuff going on from a kid's perspective, even though I'm not saying you're not

intellectual, but it's a challenge, especially when you're put in a position when you're with a spouse who is not around kids all day.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: That was always a challenge, especially when I first started teaching. And every once in a while, even my kids would say get off with the teacher voice, stop the teacher voice!

Andrew: Haha.

Vinessa: Stop, you know, you need to quit that. And that to me is always a challenge for teachers, to kind of be able to flip that switch sometimes when they need to.

Andrew: Okay. So, would you say that extends to work too, as far as the carrying things home? Uh, would you say that's a challenge for teachers, or has that been a challenge for you in the past? Have you learned how to switch off?

Vinessa: Um, no. I don't think, I don't think teachers ever really do because I think if you're, if you're a teacher who wants to teach, you're always thinking. I mean, I even got to the point when like my husband sometimes will go, Hey, I just saw this video you could incorporate, or I just read this article or something on teaching. You know, your family kind of becomes a part of that, or like, my kids um you know when you need to send them these you know they'll send me postcards and say this would be cool in your classroom, you know, I mean, they get to that point too with your family, um, but I think, so I don't think it ever really turns off, that part of it.

But I will say this, when my boys um especially my younger one, was playing basketball, he was a much more serious athlete, went on to play in college, um, but I remember one day my husband said to me and he said in love and I took it that way but he said to me his senior year cause we went to everything, you know, and he looked at me and said "Do you understand that if you do not put those books down" because I would grade during timeouts and stuff like that! I mean, I would try to grade a paper or whatever, or parents would come up, and you know, you feel obligated to kind of talk to them or whatever, and he said to me, "do you realize that your kids, they will remember you as always having your books in your hands or talking to a parent unless you deal with that."

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: And he said, "you know, this is his senior year in high school;" our oldest one had already gone on, and he said, "you've got to get a grip on this."

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I was like, you're right, you know. And I think that you know that can be a challenge for a lot of teachers: being able to say okay, I have got to put this aside and focus on my own kid. And I think for older teachers like now that my kids are growing and out of the

house, I really try to look for that a lot. You know, if I see a younger teacher that's trying to watch their kid at a sporting event, a lot of times I'll just stand there and deflect those parents at times.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Just kind of assert myself, and just, you know, as an older teacher, you can do that. You know, or even there's times when I've said to somebody, I have a young gentleman who works near me now, he's just a newlywed, um, and there's times he coaches, and there's times I've stepped over and said, you know, you really ought to get home.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: You know, I don't tell him what to do, because I realize I don't want to come off as you know that mean bossy teacher that's older, but it's like, I realize how many hours he spent there, and he's got dinner with his wife. And I learned the hard way you gotta protect that, so I think that's one of the things that's a challenge, no matter how long you've been teaching.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But I think that's also a blessing, that sometimes you can see it, where somebody in the middle of it, you know, they're in their late 20s early 30s; they're just going at it, and they sometimes don't see it, where in hindsight, I wish there had been times people had stepped in and said to me, go home. This doesn't, you know, in ten years, nobody's going to care that that got graded tonight, you know.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Go to your house! Haha.

Andrew: Haha. Okay, that's helpful. Umm, so I'd like to start moving into uh kind of your teaching philosophies and kind of why behind what you do. Um, now, my very first question would be what do you believe would be the purpose of teaching? And, uh, by extension, might even ask you is the purpose of teaching history different, or do they all have kind of the same purpose?

Vinessa: Okay, um. I kind of wrote this down; I know I keep rambling, um, what I wrote was, is to give you a strong overall knowledge base; because I want them to be curious. Um, because I think eventually they're gonna figure out what they like, but I think it's important that they get a little bit of everything.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, and obviously you know as a Christian school teacher I want them to see God's hand in everything. So I always put that Christian worldview on what I teach. But I think in

terms of looking at history, um, I think history's a real blessing, um, because we have the opportunity as a history teacher I can touch every subject a little bit. I can talk about great scientists of that era, I can talk about great mathematicians, I can point out art, I can have them read literature, um, um, for me it's history especially goes beyond just who did what and the dates, and sadly, a lot of times history is relegated to that. You know--

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: This guy did this, and that's it, instead of teaching them this is the way to critically think. Why did they make those decisions? Were those decisions good or bad? Um, I believe, you know, Ecclesiastes has a verse that says there's nothing new under the sun, so when a kid reads a statement about you know George Washington's men were cold, okay, you can relate to that. They were cold at Valley Forge; yeah, I mean, think about the last time you were really cold. They were cold as you were, probably even worse. It's like trying to make history relatable, because I do think there's a huge gap, especially nowadays, between the younger people and the older people, and I think sometimes when you point to why they made the decisions they made, they realize they did the best with the information they had at the time, and I think it's important that we teach kids that, because so many times they become judgemental instead of realizing this is what happened, this is why they did it. Now, what decisions do I make in my life?

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: and how is I think that's the purpose of our teaching, is to make them um really broad based, um, I'm not a big believer in specializing in something when you're in 7th grade or even in 11th grade, you know there's still so much to learn, but just to make them curious that they want to learn, or to realize, you know, and I tell my kids all the time, I've never been good at math, but I appreciate it more now.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: I was never great at science, but now I have a curiosity, you know, so maybe they don't love history right now, um, but one day they might, and at least you know something about it.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So I think the purpose of teaching is to give them a broad base, especially history, cause we have so many options that the other subjects don't have.

Andrew: Yeah. History certainly is unique in that way. Uh, that's one of the things I like about it, personally. Um--

Vinessa: Yeah, Exactly.

Andrew: So kind of based off that, how does good teaching affect a student? I think you started to touch on it as far as giving them a broad base and curiosity and uh maybe maybe being a

better judge of uh whatever experiences they have in the future, uh, would you say those are the main things, or are their other things that help a student have a good teaching experience?

Vinessa: Well, I think one of the things I was thinking about with that, um, I think especially nowadays, a lot of it is because when you're teaching, when, and, and teaching is material but it's always how you run your classroom.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I think there's a lot of times that you are sending messages, um, one of the things that we talk about that I know you wanted to talk about too is how does a good teacher act.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I think that affects the students, I think consistency in who you are, I, I, you know, as faculty members we kind of you know you have faculty members you respect and don't; it bothers me when kids come in and say well, she was in a good mood today or he was in a bad mood today, that should, that, you know, we're all human and we're going to have days that we're struggling.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: and I'm not saying teachers you know need to walk on water, but there needs to be consistency within your classroom. If your kids doesn't know who you are as a person when they walk in, you know, that's just gonna ruin their day, because they don't know how to act, they don't know what the expectation is in terms of their behavior, in terms of you know the material; there's gotta be a consistency because I think that affects the students.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I think when you run your classroom we're going to be, you know, I'm going to be consistent, you know, I try to always at least be pleasant and in a good mood, you know I don't want to be oh she's, you know, she's upset about something today; I try to not take that into the classroom with me; I try to be consistent. I think it affects the kids that way, but I think it also puts me in a position where when I go to do something, like I always do my birthday song, right?

Andrew: Mhmm

Vinessa: It's really quick; "this is your birthday song, it doesn't last too long, hey!" You know? But I always bring that student up, and I say, "Hey, tell us what you're gonna do today," and inevitably, no matter what grade it is, they wanna talk and be a part of it, and it's like, no, this day is about this person, this is their moment to have a birthday, and I think when you as a teacher have been consistent, you have the right to demand certain things out of your students, you know, today we're not going to be, it's not about us, it's not about me, it's not about you, it's

about this student. It sends a message to your kids that, you know, sometimes you can't, the world doesn't revolve around you.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: You know. And I think that's important. Um, that's one of those subliminal things in teaching that you're passing on to your students. Um, I think too it's important to pass to those students not just the material's important, but they're important. I think you have to be careful how you do that. Um, this past week even, a couple of days ago, we had a student who was one of our more rambunctious little students, he was online the first nine weeks, you know, where he was on Zoom; I had him on Zoom while I was teaching them, and, um, he was very inconsistent, he would come out of class, he would drop out, he would um not turn his work in to Google classroom and all that, and it's very hard to hold those kids accountable other than to just fail them, you know. But he came back into the classroom probably, um, we give them a 6 weeks option, so he came in after about 6 weeks; he's been in class probably about 2 weeks total.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: He was absent the other day, and one of my students across the room had said that um just kinda somebody else had said "I know those teachers are glad when he's gone" or something like that, and I'm like "woah" cause I was taking roll, I'm like, what did you just say? And of course they're, like, scared to death, and he goes, we know that the teachers don't really like him, and I said woah, wait a minute, let's talk about that. Now, I really like this kid. I like all of you. I love all of you. I said now are you all great students? Absolutely not. I said, some of you make me want to pull my hair out cause you won't even do your homework, I said, but I love you as a kid. I said, you know, you may not like me as a teacher, but that doesn't mean you can't like me as a person.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: I said, the same way with a student. I may not like you because you don't do what you're supposed to and you, you know, it frustrates me; that doesn't mean I don't like you as a student. So, I mean, you have those teaching moments; that affects kids. And it affects the way they take in your subject. Um, you know, it doesn't mean, and I always start my classes by saying, every kid is not going to love history and it's okay.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: but you gotta get through this, so let's figure out how to do that. You know, and I think those are the things that affect kids, and it affects how they're gonna respond to you, to your material, and just to school in general. So I don't know if that's what you're looking for, but that's kinda how I think about it.

Andrew: No, I like that a lot, especially, especially like saying that a person is valuable no matter like what their work reflects as far as students, as far as teachers, I think that's really important. Uh--

Vinessa: Yeah.

Andrew: Definitely. And so, going on uh a couple of other questions, now this one comes a little bit from our history; when I was in your class, you made a comment, and I remembered this comment throughout the years--

Vinessa: Which I can't believe you remembered that!

Andrew: and the comment was something to the effect of, uh, that you took it as a compliment; one of the biggest compliments that you received as a teacher was when a student asked you your political affiliation, um, because if I remembered correctly, it showed that you were unbiased. Could you explain that, and why you considered that a compliment, and how it reflects on teachers?

Vinessa: Sure! I was teaching, now you were in the middle school class so I don't, I guess I can't remember why I made the comment exactly, but what happened was I teach - I taught before I left; I don't have it this year, but I will get it back because I love that class- um, American Government. And it's a twelfth grade class, it's actually one semester. First semester's American government; second semester's economics. And, um, one of the things that my own kids had experienced, they had been with a teacher who was very, um, clear in what they thought, politically, when they had taken government. My older son had had that experience. And even though, to be honest with you, I had agreed with the teacher, I can remember just thinking that's not, as a teacher, that's not what I want. And even as a parent, that wasn't what I wanted because I wanted my kids to learn about both. They're obviously going to get my opinion at home or whatever, but I wanted them to go in and see things that, you know, and make their own mind up. And so, when I became, when I got the opportunity to teach government, that was very important to me. Um, being from a Christian school obviously there's a lot of, you know, there's a Biblical worldview that we put in our classes. But we also are in the capital city of Florida, um, which is probably two to one for the Democratic party, and then--so I had a very mixed amount of kids. Um, and I thought, when I went in there, I thought-- you know, my number one goal for this class is to teach them processes -- how government works. But I don't want them to walk away and go "well, she's this," and completely close their mind off to the other side, regardless of how I felt. That was my goal, because I feel like, well, they are gonna move on and hopefully be productive citizens and see the importance of voting, and the importance of being involved in the processes, and not be ignorant, because honestly it just drives me crazy when people talk about things and it's like no, that's not how it works, you know? And I want my students to feel like hey, I understand this. And that was my goal. So when those students at the, you know, would come and say to me, "Ms. Parker, what are you?" you know, at the end of class, they're

always like, well, “what do you think?” and I would never answer that question. I would say, well, if I think, if I feel, this, you know, if I think this, if I’m a this, I feel this. If I think this, then I’m this. You know, and I would never give them an answer and it just would frustrate them, but I thought, okay, I did it. They...and to this day, you know, they still don’t -- they don’t -- they don’t know; they may think they know, but they don’t always know, you know, and it’s kind of a fun thing.

Andrew: Mhmm. I -- that -- I’m really glad that I was able to ask you that, because -- uh -- a couple of years ago, I actually, I brought up in class, one of my classes, I told students that I had, I said, “I had this one teacher, and she said this” and then I reiterated what you said to my students. That was during the election year, that was my first year teaching.

Vinessa: Yeah. Aww. Good! Good!

Andrew: Haha. So, I have a couple of questions about ___ so ___ do you have any ___ um, but as far as change over the years, um, both in um as a teacher some things that you’ve -- perhaps some things that have happened in schools that you’ve seen in students. So, my first major question would be, um, in what ways is teaching different um from when you began?

Vinessa: Um, probably the biggest thing is technology.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, and that has pros and cons. Um, I think their technology...sigh...the, uh, let me just do it this way. The pros of technology obviously are like things like this where you can talk face to face, which is cool.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: You can go on and find clips, like, you know, I use all the time the stuff from, like, national parks, so when you’re teaching about a ford or something you know we just did a thing on fords and they can go on and look at it. I mean, stuff like that is really cool. It makes it more real. The bad part of it has been, um, in my opinion, it has made the idea of especially virtual classes that you can just spend ten minutes on something and boom, you got it! You took marine biology in, uh, you know, uh, eighteen week course, you did it in twelve, and now you’re an expert, you never need to take it again. Um, and, to me that’s a shame because there’s no real depthness to it; um, you know, there, I, I hate that part of it. I hate how easy it is for them to cheat. Um,

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: You know, and I think when you, when you as a teacher try to combat that, like for me, for papers that I really want them to do, um,

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: it's, sigh, if I make them take notes and bring it in to write the paper in class, they resent it, and their parents resent it. And it's like I don't think sometimes the parents realize how accessible that stuff is. Um, and how, how little they actually read, you know, and, and obviously reading is such a big thing because you internalize so much of that information. Um, they don't do it, not like, not like I as a teacher wish they would. Um, I do--

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: I do think too that just the emphasis on talking about ways things have changed, there's so much emphasis on the SAT and the ACT, more the SAT, which is just English and math. Um, and--

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And so, especially what I teach, history is just one of the "oh, that's just history," instead of realizing it's their whole -- the way they approach life. The other thing I think is, um, it makes it very -- technology in particular has made life hard on teachers. You can't be spontaneous like you used to be. Um, you know, for me, if I'm in a classroom and my kids' eyes start glazing over, I need to do something -- more than just make them stand up and stretch. Maybe we play a game, maybe we do something. With high school students, I mean, you can play games, but you gotta be careful because then it becomes childish. And that's not good either. And, you know, it can't be just a game to get energy out. There's gotta be a purpose for it. But part of the problem is, you know, they would rather --

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Why can't we just? The other day, I had a student that's really struggling. And, um, I, we were sitting; there were two of them together, we were sitting, and I said, "look! Why don't we, you know, let's try to find something new they can do. I said, "why don't you do this? Take these index cards, cut them in half, put the word on one, put this on the other, and make it like a game and -- and the one girl goes, "Well, why do we have to do that when we can just do Quizlet?" And I thought, okay, this sounds mean, but if you click on Quizlet, that's it -- you clicked it. And that's it. There's something about--

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: having to write out the cards, having to read the information, look at it, move it around, that tactile thing, even though I would say she's more just a visual learner, but there's something about doing it that's gonna put it in her brain

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But you know, Quizlet's great, nothing is horrible, cause I know a lot of teachers love it, but it's quick, and for kids that struggle

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: You know, and they make, you know, they do their little Quizlet, and they think they're perfect. I matched everything. But it also allows you to redo it several times. But are you really learning it?

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: If that's how you learn it's great, but there are so many people that don't, it needs to be more. But you can't always be spontaneous like that in class, where I would use, a lot of times if I had ten kids whose eyes are glazing, I made them all do it.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And now it's, you know, but, that may push back a quiz, it may push back a test, it may mean I put the homework off, well I immediately have to get online and update everything or the parents freak out. You don't have the spontaneity that you used to.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Because if you put it out there, you know, the parents know about it; now they're upset because we planned our whole life over what you said you were doing the next two weeks. But it doesn't take in account any of my ability as a professional to look and realize my kids need more, you know. Um, and there's --

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: There's not much forgiveness by, from what I've seen in either private or public schools, for that type of ability for a teacher to be a professional in that way. If there's a fire drill or something weird happens, parents are okay with that. But if I as a professional say, you know what, I'm changing everything, they get upset. And especially because a lot of times when classes are changing and stuff's happening between the kids or whatever, you don't have time right then to run and put it in your computer. To them, everything takes a minute.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Which is true, but I have only five minutes between classes, and I'm dealing with little Johnny and little Susie, and I want to make sure that I spoke with little Patty before she gets out the door, you know, I don't, I don't have time to always run over and do it. To me that has made a lot more stress on a teacher, in both ways.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So. To me, that's--

Andrew: Uh--

Vinessa: That's very much a change, that compared to what I, the flexibility I felt when I first started teaching.

Andrew: Mhm. That's interesting. Yeah, I've never considered that, especially cause I started my teaching career with just online things. But. . .

Vinessa: Yeah.

Andrew: At that point, it definitely does take a good amount of energy. Um, so I do have a question about, um, actually, your uh the community around you, um--

Vinessa: Yeah.

Andrew: As far as teaching, so I'm wondering how things have changed or perhaps have stayed the same among fellow teachers. Do you see fellow teachers as being different or the same as when you first started? Um, you said a little bit earlier that you work with perhaps newer teachers, or perhaps younger teachers.

Vinessa: Yeah.

Andrew: Um, maybe comparing him to some older teachers you've taught with. Are there any differences that you see?

Vinessa: Well, I think in terms of just younger teachers, um, I think there's a lot of excitement there, and that's kinda good because that--that captures it.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, I do think their lack of fear of using technology is awesome.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, and that's a good thing. They're kind of, they're a good resource that way. New ideas, because you know, you can't go back and redo, sometimes, you can get in a rut, and I think, I love having that new energy and new ideas, things like that. Um, I would say though sometimes I don't think there's quite the commitment level, and I don't necessarily mean commitment um to their -- I want to be careful how I say this, because I don't want it to be insulting and I don't mean it insulting, but I think in some ways it's a positive, they have more of an idea of balance.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: There's times when I think that's good, because I think for them as people they need more, but you know, teachers in general need more balance.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: To be able to be at home, to be able to be a parent, those kind of things. Then there's other things when I think, okay, this is the point of commitment, you need to commit a little more time here.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So I think, you know, where it used to be, everybody was that committed at that level. But I'm not always sure that was that healthy either.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: It's a change, but in some ways it's better, because there is more guarding of your personal time. And in some ways, it's not as good for the students at times.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So, it's just different. I don't know if it's all bad or all good. It's just different. Um, you know, um, there's a lot more emphasis in schools in general, and I, you know, the teachers they gravitate to um...they gravitate to things being done quickly.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Enjoy that, sometimes, you know. Um, where I think of I sometimes I feel kind of old school cause I want them to get more in depth like than, than really they need to. So that's probably on my fault, on my end too.

Andrew: Mhmm. Interesting.

Vinessa: But I do think we have to be on our guard for each other. You know. Like I said, before, you gotta look for teachers that need a little extra help in terms of just guarding their time or guarding their family life or whatever, so. . .

Andrew: Mhm. Okay. Then what about parents? So, have you seen parents kind of change over the years from when you first started out teaching and when you teach now?

Vinessa: Yeah

Andrew: Do you see any differences. . Haha.

Vinessa: Yeah. Um, I think my biggest thing with parents a lot of time with new parents are just seeing changes is there's so much more concern about their GPAs.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: There's not, they don't worry as much about their kids being knowledgeable as much as their kids getting good grades. And I think it's always been like that to a certain extent, you

know, I'm not saying this happened all of a sudden over the last ten years or whatever, but I think there, you know, there's just to me seems like there's way more emphasis; it's like, okay -- they seem a little shocked sometimes when their kids aren't, you know, they, they, they are sometimes get so in awe that their kids are so technology advanced, that it's like, yeah

Andrew: Mhmm

Vinessa: They don't necessarily grasp bigger concepts.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: There's no critical thinking there, you know. Everything is quick. And to me, that's really hard sometimes, cause I'm looking and thinking, I really want this kid to get it, and they're thinking, can't we just get him the basics and move the GPA up so they can go to college? Which isn't, you know, isn't a good...I don't know...I'm not sure how that's gonna play out in society in the end, you know.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And as teachers sometimes we tended to be the students that liked all that stuff you know...So as parents, sometimes, they look, and a lot of them that, you know, they liked what they liked, they didn't like school in general.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So, that can be a difficult conversation sometimes. And I think parents have changed a little bit in that way. But. . .I don't know.

Andrew: Okay.

Vinessa: Haha.

Andrew: Well, bridged off that question, and I think you were starting to touch on this, what about students? How have they changed? It sounds like you were starting to talk about students and having these quick, or quick need for quick knowledge, automatically, right away. Um, would you say that's the main thing, or can you think of anything else you might want to add to that as far as how students have changed over the years?

Vinessa: I think the biggest thing with students is, they have a lot more access to adult-type subjects, and--

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: They're not ready for them. And I don't mean that as like they're all just immature, I mean, they're kids. They are kids.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, and some, I mean, it, it amazes me what my middle schoolers sometimes are aware of, and I just think, are they really emotionally ready for that? To, for that kind of information? And, and I think that sometimes, like even when teaching history, something will surprise them and I'll think, okay, for the information that you take in daily through your social media, this, this fact should not surprise you -- but yet there's, there's --

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: It shows me, reminds me, they're still very innocent -- but yet they're exposed to stuff that I don't think sometimes they get.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I'm not sure it's healthy for them to be exposed to. I've always believed that a seventeen and eighteen year old needs to be a little cocky, because the world's hard. And if they have no, you know, kind of got that thing that says hey, I can conquer the world, they get beat down pretty quick.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So I've always thought that was a good thing, and I'm not sure anymore that I see that.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: It's almost like, well, my parents will take care of this. And it's like no, where's that, where's that party that says, hey, I'm gonna go out there and, you know, conquer the world! It's more like, well, I'll conquer the world, and if I don't my mom or dad will take care of it.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: That is a huge mentality difference in our young people. Um, also, they're um one of the things that kind of shocked me when I did yearbook um you know trying to deal one of the things you want to add is just you know this has been a really weird year, and not all of it's been positive with COVID and, you know, people's reactions to it and how it's changed things . . . and I made a couple suggestions and my girls were like ugh, that's not positive.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I'm thinking, well, that's true, but that is what's going on in the world. That's what's happening right now. And no, it's not positive, but, you know, it is what it is, and this idea that everything has to be good and we want everything to be positive is becoming to the point of where it's like okay, are kids really facing reality? Because I'm not saying the world's all negative at all, or that we need to be the bearers of bad news, but there needs to be a balance.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: And to me, a lot of times, students don't seem very balanced. And again, I think it comes from they don't know how to handle these adult issues, so we're just going to shove them aside and everything's going to be positive. But, that's just not reality. To me, that's been the huge difference in students. It also, just, you know, I know it's a very positive side to them seeing the world and meeting people from other places, but honestly, sometimes I watch. . . I walked in the bathroom the other day and I got two girls in there doing the Tik Tok thing, you know, they're trying to do their dance moves

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I'm thinking, okay, this is...this is kind of weird, but they wanted to watch themselves in the mirror, and I'm thinking, you know, you're a middle schooler. This is not, you know, this is not something that we need to be putting out there. But it's just who their generation is.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And I'm not, and I'm not even sure it's a teacher's place, but I feel like sometimes it's put on the schools that somehow we're supposed to regulate this somehow, or control it. And I think that's going to...to me, students, and I guess that would go back to parents too...

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: They've got to understand that their role has got to be a parent, and they can't expect a teacher to monitor that all the time. And I think the pressure on teachers to monitor stuff all the time is becoming more, and we just can't be the ones, especially on their social media. So to me that's kind of the biggest change I've seen over the last 15 years. . . How do we adapt to that? As teachers, as students, as parents.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah. So, kind of, I, it kind of changes gears a little bit, but this kind of deals with the closing remarks. So, I'm first wondering, as this goes online at UD's, uh, for students who are going to become teachers, do you have any pieces -- sorry -- of advice that you'd like to give to new teachers or teachers who are just starting out?

Vinessa: Um, okay. Well, I wrote these down too, so I promise I won't ramble anymore.

Andrew: Haha.

Vinessa: I will, but I'll try not to.

Andrew: It's been very helpful, so please take as much time as you like.

Vinessa: Well, we'll see.

Andrew: Haha.

Vinessa: I would say time management, as a new teacher, taking, you know, cause that is one thing I've probably, in hindsight of just looking at it, my husband is a professional at what he does, and he has taken a lot of time management courses. And I wish I had done more of that.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: Um, you know, even now, that's always been my own personal weakness, but I, as a new teacher, I would say that is probably the number one thing. Um, you do more probably by 7 AM than most people do by noon. You know, just. . .there's so much coming at you, and the -- being disciplined in your time management is huge. And it also will save a lot of your personal life, because you know, these are the hours I do this, and that's it.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, and that's, so I would encourage them to do that. The other thing is, and this I learned really over the last three years, um, we teachers live in a different world, and that's what frustrates - like I had mentioned before, you know, a parent is used to getting answers back. We always, you know, we usually tell our teachers, get back to them within 24 hours. In the real world, if you have clients, you're getting back to them before the end of the business day if you possibly can.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: I think that's unrealistic, but I've found more and more that a parent's like, I emailed you about this, but they emailed me at 2 in the morning, and if I didn't answer them by 3 o'clock in the next day, they're losing their mind. And it's like, okay, I didn't even wake up till, you know, 4 or 5, can you give me a couple extra hours, but that's not how their world is.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: So when you can get back to them you know one thing my husband, and we were talking about this earlier, he's like, even just a quick email that says, I see this, I will get back with you after school or whatever--

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: That's what they're expecting. They don't necessarily expect you to respond to everything, and you need to take time before you respond, especially to a parent. But let them know, you know, you got it.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Because in their world, things happen twice as fast as they do in the world of teaching--they just do. So I would say as a new student, if you do that immediately, it'll amaze you how that will calm your parents down, that they just heard for you.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: The other thing is, um, I would say -- and this sounds silly, but that whole dress for success thing...

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: I know it's kind of old school, we all want to be comfortable, which is fine -- but I think the first few weeks you teach, um, I know for me, I'm tall. I'm 5'10. But I teach high school kids that are over 6 feet. Um, I wear heels the first two weeks, not because I think I look great in heels or that I like it, but I need to establish that rapport that you're not going to walk in the classroom and physically intimidate me. Not that my students would, but you always have one or two that that's how they kind of go through life, you know.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: They're just kinda, no, you know. You've gotta have that presence. And I think--

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: That's the biggest thing. And honestly, if you're trying to be a teacher and you walk in a classroom and people don't notice that you're the teacher, you don't need to teach. You've got to be the presence in the classroom. Um, and as, you know, this sounds, it almost sounds egotistical and I don't mean it to be, but I don't relinquish control of my classroom to anybody, even my principal, my administrator. When they walk in, I acknowledge them immediately, but I make sure that I say "Good morning, Dr. Whoever. Would you like to speak to my class?" because my students need to know this is my classroom, he's my guest, and I'm honoring his presence.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But when I, you know, sometimes you have people that'll just walk, you know, they'll take, your...a child, if you leave the door open, they will take your classroom over. Parents will do that. Not so much now cause we don't let them in the building cause of COVID, but I've seen schools and heard of teachers, public and private, that parents will come to the door and next thing you know, the parent is running the conversation, he's running the classroom -- No. You've got to establish that. If that is your weak area, you're going to be so frustrated as a teacher. So my suggestion is always, you know, those first few times that you're meeting with parents, the first few times...not to intimidate them, I mean, you don't have to put on the suit, the vest, the tie or whatever...

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But you do need to look like you're professional, you know.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: They wear jeans on Fridays. Most companies, you know, they're not wearing jeans every day. They're not as lax as sometimes their kids think they are. So you need to be the professional, and that means that you need to look the part as well as respond quickly to emails or things like that. Um, and you need to control your classroom and not relinquish it, even to your administration, without showing them the honor that, you know, obviously, you're not going to tell your principal not to speak. But you're going to do that in a way that opens the door that your kids see honor being shown to authority, but also, they know that you're in charge and you're giving him the ship, you know, because he deserves it kind of thing. Or she deserves it. Um, the other thing I've always found is to be quick to apologize.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: Which, sometimes, I've, I've seen teachers, new teachers, older teachers...we don't like to be corrected sometimes in our classrooms, and that's so wrong.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, you know. I'm a horrible, and, and really not as bad as my students think I am, but I'm, I, you know, when I go to say a new word, a lot of times I purposely will slaughter it, especially if I have kids in my classroom that don't -- they get words confused, or they don't speak real well. And I allow a student to correct me, because if I correct a student -- not to the point that they think less of me, but just -- it's okay to be corrected.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Even I get corrected. And the other thing is, and this is something that happened when I taught the Economics class...I had a young man that went on to become an incredible engineer at like a major firm here in the country....this kid knew math. I mean, he knew it two seconds after I said it, and probably before I ever said it. Well, I realized immediately that this kid is like off the chain in math. So, when we would get to a math subject, there's times I'd say, you know what, do you mind...I'm going to let so-and-so go over this subject because he's really good at it. And the kids, you know, it's okay to sometimes say, "you explain the math," you know, because, first of all, it made them realize, okay, Ms. Parker doesn't think she knows everything. Although obviously I knew my material. But, it showed that I was willing to admit that these kids are really smart at something. And of course they're seniors, so there's a little more leeway there than letting, you know, a seventh grader do that.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But I think that's never a bad thing, you know, to admit you're wrong, to be quick to say you were incorrect, um, you know, to apologize to a student. I've had, you know, apologized a couple of times in my career, to really say, you know what, I overreacted or I jumped the gun on something, and apologized. I think that's huge. Just don't come to the point where it becomes too much of a habit, and then, there may be other issues there. The other thing is, one thing I did learn, because I do feel like, um, let me just make sure there's nothing I...to constantly be creative, that was the other thing. I wrote a couple other things down. You've gotta constantly be creative and constantly reevaluate your material.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And a lot of times, we look and we realize that we gravitate to what we're good at. So, if you are a teacher that loves to lecture, you're gonna gravitate to lectures. If you're a teacher that loves visual stuff or you love technology, everything gets old. Doing a powerpoint everyday gets old. Doing a, you know, whatever the, you know, doing a lecture every day...reading in class every day...and I know it's limiting because of COVID; um, I know with our school, we can't do as much, like we...

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: It's maddening, cause you can't do all the quick tactile things we used to do. Um, but we have to look at your curriculum and realize, okay, I'm going to gravitate towards presenting it this way; let me go back and reevaluate and make sure that I'm actually covering everything. And remember, even in terms of technology, it's amazing what will happen if you do like a trivial pursuit with a card game. Kids love that. Now, we can't do it with COVID, but eventually hopefully we'll return to stuff like that.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: But throw that in there every once in a while. Because, you know, everything gets old.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Um, and if you remember that, and not be scared of old or new. For a teacher like me, I don't gravitate to technology, but I do you know...I look for good powerpoints. Sometimes I'll let my husband create a powerpoint or my kids. I'll do the material, but I let them add stuff that I, you know, I don't have the interest to sit and figure it out sometimes. So I'll let them do that.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And they enjoy that, so that makes it different for the class. The other thing I did learn in terms of parents, and I thought this was really dumb when my school first came out with it...Um, we did this thing where we were required and had to do a report where we called a parent, two parents a week, just to say nothing bad, it couldn't be because they were in trouble,

but it was just to say hey, did you know so-and-so did such-and-such. And I thought it was really dumb. Well, I was talking to one of my mentor teachers, and she made a comment...She said, do you realize that when you go to a parent meeting, you set yourself up for failure if all you've ever said is negative stuff.

Andrew: Hmm.

Vinessa: But if they've talked to you two or three times in that first couple of weeks, and you've told them or sent them a note or both, you know, and said, hey, so-and-so did such-and-such today, it was awesome, or you know, I really enjoy having them in my class, they're always funny, or whatever...and parents will be interested, or I found it interesting to see how many parents if you tell them I really appreciate how they participated in class, their first reaction is Oh God he's talking too much...no, I'm really serious, I really like how much he talks! But they're so used to hearing that stuff that that's their first reaction. Something else I've found out, a public school friend of mine told me, she said she teaches in a district where, you know, it's a lower income district. Those parents, a lot of time, don't put up with foolishness. Well, when she would leave a message for a parent, just to say hey I enjoyed little Susie today, that parents a lot of time would, basically, that child got beat because, what did you do in school? That teacher...You know, their first instinct is that they did something wrong. So she would stop calling and leaving messages until she could reach that parent, because she wanted them to know, you know, little Susie did not do anything wrong.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And, you know, I'm really pleased with them. Because a parent instinctually thought something was wrong. So, um, one of the things that I took away from that was always contact that parent, make sure that, you know, and make sure that the first thing they hear from me is something really great about their kid. And that way, when I do have to approach something that's not quite write or a bad grade or whatever, they already like me. They already realize I'm on the side of the child.

Andrew: Mmm.

Vinessa: Because I see it as a given. But for a parent, it isn't. Um, the other thing, and am I being too long? Tell me to hush if you need to.

Andrew: Haha. No. Um, I would like to hear this piece of advice. This all is very helpful.

Vinessa: Haha, okay. Well, the other thing, an administrator had told me this this time, remember that most of us as teachers--we really like school. We like learning. We like reading. We like math. We like all that stuff. But most parents. You know, they liked what they liked, but they didn't want to be teachers. They didn't like school that much. A lot of times when you sit down

in a parent meeting, they're holding back...they've had this resentment towards, you know, the English teacher since they were in 8th grade, you know, or whatever.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: They're gonna get that, that's gonna come out. They're usually, if it's a discipline issue, they've had, you know, if they're having problems with you as a teacher, and you're good with kids and you handle kids, imagine what their home life must be like. That frustration--

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Is about to hit you like a freight train. Let them talk. Let them get it all out, even if it's hateful towards you. You gotta be, you've got to be quiet. And for teachers, that's tough, because we like to talk and fix. You've gotta shut your mouth. The first 15 minutes, outside of maybe saying hello and saying a prayer with them, I shut my mouth. And that was learned the hard way, but they gotta get all of that out.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: And once they reach the point where they're done, then I can figure out, really, what's the problem here. Little Johnny is, you know, if he's being a pain here, he's being a pain at home. These parents are frustrated. Um, these parents have, you know, three other kids, and they, what they did worked with their three other kids, but little Susie's not getting it, and they're frustrated.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Some of them, they just don't like me. And there are times, you know, you're not gonna click with everybody. That's really what the problem is. What can I do to kind of wedge, make it where we can work together.

Andrew: Mhmm.

Vinessa: Once, because that's what you're listening for, that fifteen minutes. All that other stuff, you just gotta realize, they're trying to...They gotta let that go. Now let's deal with what the real problem is...but if you immediately, you try to tell them the issue, they're not hearing it till they get that out. So that was, you know, that got me through a lot -- those parent meetings. Especially when I would struggle in the beginning. Um. Let me think if there was anything else...Hmm...

Andrew: I'm really glad that you came back to the parent--

Vinessa: Go ahead.

Andrew: Yeah. I was just going to say, I'm really glad you came back to the parent meetings because I was meaning to ask you how you had been able to get better at that, since that was one

of your struggles. But I do think, I think that's about as much time as we have today for our interview. Thank you so, so much, Mrs. Parker! It's been really great to see you and talk to you, especially having been from the other side, so being in your class and then being a teacher now, knowing some of the things that happened behind the scenes. Um, I just want to thank you really for all of the work that you put in, and I definitely both saw it and remembered it. Um, so it's been really great, really great catching up with you, and I just want to thank you, uh, for all that you've done, for me as a student and all of your other students throughout the years.

Vinessa: Well, one thing really quick. I will write this down. I will write this down. And one of the best advices I got was when you have a moment where a student comes back to you or sends you something, write those things down. Because when the days get hard, you gotta remember that. Because when the days get really hard, you don't want to remember that. You want to say, I'm done, this is crazy. And, you know, it's important to keep those things. And I thank you for letting me know that. Um, because there are days, you know, it gets too much. But when you can think, hey, somebody else learned from it, and maybe it wasn't, you know, maybe I wasn't as horrible as I thought I was, you know, it's appreciated. So I, you need to keep that stuff too.

Andrew: Haha.

Vinessa: So thank you for that.

Andrew: Yes ma'am, I will. And I will send you this video so that you can keep it on those days.

Vinessa: Oh, no. I don't want to see all this. I'll see if my husband sees it, he'll be like, oh my Lord, shut up, woman!

Andrew: Haha. Well, Mrs. Parker, I hope everything goes well for you during this time of COVID, and I hope you have a great day, on a Saturday of all days.

Vinessa: Enjoy your students, enjoy your year. And tell your new wife I said hi! So exciting! Y'all take care. See you later. Bye!

Andrew: Bye!