

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FAITH D'ALESSANDRO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

PAUL CLEMENS

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

JULY 1, 2021

TRANSCRIPT BY

PAUL CLEMENS

Paul Clemens: Okay, I hope that works.

Faith D'Alessandro: I think it did.

PC: Here we go. Yes, good. This is a little different than last time, and that is, I'm going to be using this transcription thing and that means I'm going to hold on to the audio longer than I would otherwise. Before I start, I'd like to just ask you if you still consent to go forward with this process. Okay?

FD: Yes.

PC: You've spent the last semester as your second semester as a graduate student in the GSE [Graduate School of Education] and this is your observation semester you've just gone through. Is that correct?

FD: I just went through the first portion of student-teaching, so I went Tuesdays and Thursdays, and then in the fall, I'll be starting my full time.

PC: You were at Woodbridge?

FD: Yes.

PC: Okay. Tell me how that went. That's really the thing I wanted to catch up on most.

FD: It went really, really well. I had an amazing cooperating teacher. The students were great. I was in a sixth grade U.S. history class, so I was really interested in the content we were working with. Everything just went very, very well.

PC: You were sixth grade U.S. history, and that's where you see yourself perhaps teaching when you get through the GSE?

FD: Yes, I would love that. I really do enjoy middle school.

PC: Tell me a little bit about what you teach in the sixth grade.

FD: We do very early American history with the sixth grade. We start out with colonies, and then we move into the Revolutionary War. I think we end after the Civil War.

PC: You were going in two days a week all the way through the term or just through the Rutgers term?

FD: I ended sometime in May, but I did show up on the last day of school for them to say bye one last time. [laughter]

PC: How many classes were you observing or taking part in?

FD: I mainly did that one sixth grade U.S. history class, because that was like the main one I should have been doing all my work in. But because we needed so many hours for the GSE and with the pandemic schedule, a lot of my classes all ended at one o'clock, the ones in the middle school, so I wouldn't have enough hours. So, I was also observing for an eighth grade world history class in the morning just to get a few more hours in. I didn't do as much, really any hands-on work with that; it was just to get more hours and spending time in a classroom. That was really interesting. That teacher was also great. He was so creative with how he would present the information. It was so funny.

PC: Which of the two did you like better? I don't mean the teachers or even the kids, but could you see yourself, having gone through both of them, not being disappointed if you got a job in an eighth grade as opposed to a sixth grade?

FD: Yes, I genuinely would not mind the age difference. Sixth grade, they need you a little bit more; they just got out of elementary school, so they're a little younger and they need a little more hand-holding. The eighth graders are much more independent. I prefer U.S. history. I liked the content of the sixth grade class better, but I did enjoy the independence that the eighth graders had.

PC: What were you essentially supposed to be doing in these two classes? What were your marching orders? Then, you can tell me what you actually did. What does the GSE want you to be doing in this?

FD: The GSE has this whole gradual program where you're supposed to take more and more work on as you go. You're supposed to start out the first few weeks observing. Then, in the middle weeks, you're supposed to be maybe facilitating certain activities and talking a bit more in class, and then towards the end, you should be doing a lot of the lesson plans, maybe teaching a lesson once a week or so. We needed to record ourselves for a few assignments where we were teaching full-on lessons, so I did get a lot of hands-on time towards the end a lot. That's pretty much what I did. I followed the Rutgers way. I think sometimes I had a little bit of trouble, where I felt like I didn't want to step on my cooperating teachers toes, because she would have something planned already and I didn't want to mess it up by me jumping in. But she was really good at, if she had something planned, she would let me do it, because that's what she wanted them to learn, but she wanted me to get the experience, when Rutgers wanted us making it on our own a little bit more, like us making them up, the lessons, which I did have a lot of experience doing, but maybe not as much as Rutgers wanted, but I did do a lot.

PC: When you were talking about your hours, is this something that's required by the state or Rutgers or by both?

FD: I'm not sure if it's different. I think Rutgers tries to do whatever the state really requires, so it probably is by the state, but from all I know, that's what Rutgers wanted to finish the semester out was to have that many hours.

PC: How many hours? What was the target number approximately?

FD: I want to say 180.

PC: Wow, 180 hours. It's a lot actually.

FD: It was a lot and especially with the schools all getting out early, some of my classmates are really struggling to get that time in.

PC: If you're doing 180 hours of this observation, how many courses do you have to take independently of this during the term? In other words, this obviously was some sort of credited work, but in addition to this, how many other courses did you have to take?

FD: So, I was taking ten credits, so that was four in the clinical and then two other classes, which, I want to say, we met for three hours. Yes, I think they were two three-hour courses.

PC: Was one of those two courses, other courses, tied to your clinical work?

FD: Yes. There was one that we had to do all semester that focused on the clinical experience and getting us ready for edTPA [Teacher Performance Assessment-Education] and those things. Then, the other class was two half-semester classes, and one of them was teaching bilingual students and the other one was urban education. So, the--I'm sorry, what?

PC: No, go ahead, that's fine.

FD: I was just going to say that the one was "Introduction to Social Studies Education"--no, that was the first semester. The second one was, I want to say, organization or something more on the lines of focusing on social studies ed and getting you ready as an educator for it.

PC: The urban education segment that you took, did that go well?

FD: Oh, yes, it went great. I learned so much that I had no idea about, because I am from the suburbs, so I didn't really know much and I felt more prepared once I took those courses.

PC: The Woodbridge school system, I assume, is somewhat different than what you were familiar with before but not entirely different?

FD: It was shockingly suburban. There was no elements of urban education in Colonia Middle School where I was. It felt kind of like where I went to middle school. [laughter]

PC: Okay. I think of Woodbridge as a big sprawling place, sort of like Edison is, with an incredible diversity of people in it, but that may not be correct. I don't know.

FD: From what I hear generally, Woodbridge is like that, but they put me in Colonia, which is more suburban. It had a very diverse plethora of students, so different races, different backgrounds. But, all in all, I think most of the students were middle class, so I wasn't really handling students from different economic backgrounds, which I think is what a lot of urban ed

prepares us for. I didn't really have to use any the knowledge I learned in that class in Colonia, but I'm sure if I get put in a different place in Woodbridge, I would have to use that knowledge more.

PC: If I understand the way the system is working now, these schools are partner schools. Were you in this school with a number of other people from the GSE at the same time who were also teaching?

FD: I was actually in Colonia on my own. There was three students who were in Woodbridge, and we were in all different schools. I believe one of them was in a high school, and then you know Melaina, she was in Fords Middle School, which was a different one in Woodbridge.

PC: How often then did the Rutgers person get in to see you or supervise you, whatever they do these days?

FD: They only popped in two times virtually, because she was uncomfortable with the pandemic. She would pop in, and we had Google Meets always going on, whether I was in person or at home, because we had a hybrid system. If students, parents weren't comfortable with them coming in, they could just log in on the Google Meet, and we would have it virtually and in person going on at the same time. So, she was able to come in twice for that. Then, I had to send in my recordings to her, so she got to see me teach that way as well.

PC: It was a slightly different situation than if the pandemic hadn't existed?

FD: Yes.

PC: That's where I was going to come to next. Let's drop back now and talk about that a little bit. Tell me in your own words, how did this semester differ from what you think it might have been if there was no pandemic?

FD: Well, I think it would be completely different. I would have been able to stay in the classroom for seven-and-a-half hours, eight hours as it normally is, but because of Corona, they had us only there until 12:15, and then I hosted office hours until, I want to say, 2:30 from my home. Normally, the kids would just be in class that whole time. I think that made getting the hours a little more difficult. Then, I didn't really get to experience classroom management as much until the end. I think I had about two weeks that I went in physically in person, and the rest of it was all online.

PC: Up until the last two plus weeks, you were literally at home all the time?

FD: Yes. I would just get up, get out of bed, get dressed, and then log into Google Meets with my kids.

PC: Okay. On the other end of that, some of the students were actually in the building and some of them were not?

FD: Well, in the beginning, everybody was at home and they didn't have this kind of in-person, at-school, whatever-you-wanted kind of deal until, I want to say, the middle of March. In the middle of March was when you had the option to come in person or not, and a lot of the kids initially didn't. Then, slowly, more and more and more came, and by the end of the year, there was a pretty good amount.

PC: Did they make any provision at the GSE or through Rutgers to get you vaccinated?

FD: We were kind of on our own to do that. They were like, "You need to get vaccinated" but didn't really give us any resources to do it. I was up until like three in the morning every night on CVS's website trying to get an appointment. I know a lot of my classmates went through that as well.

PC: You said you came back for the last couple of weeks or came into the school for the last couple of weeks. Did the school have any requirement that you be vaccinated before you came in?

FD: The school did not have a requirement to be vaccinated, but you had to have like, "I haven't left this country in fourteen days" and no fever and we had to everyday come in, take our temperature, fill out a waiver, wear a mask all day. They took those COVID precautions, but they didn't make us get vaccinated.

PC: To go on with what we were talking about before, how was this teaching experience different than what it might have been, better, worse, unusual, how do you describe it?

FD: I think it's definitely unusual. I never actually got to be in the classroom at one time with all of the students there, which is really strange. Normally, every day, they're all there, and I never got that experience. It was being in the classroom and having to juggle teaching the kids who were in person, making sure we're giving the kids at home attention as well, and if we're showing anything to the kids in the class, we have to show to the ones on Zoom. So, I think a lot of it was more virtual than it normally would have been, too. I know my cooperating teacher was showing me all these different activities that she likes to do normally, where they're physically making something in the classroom or walking around the room and things like that, and we couldn't do that because of COVID. So, we had to make a lot of the activities into a virtual way. That was different, too. I definitely think if there was no COVID, it would have been a lot easier to get the hours. I would have had more experience at classroom management, and we would have taken a lot more opportunities to do things hands-on with the kids rather than through the internet. I think it also made the kids--the novelty of being on the computer was totally gone by the end. They were over it; they didn't want to be on the computer anymore. That used to be something really fun they'd like to do. If we could make an online activity for them, they would love that. I think that all got changed because of the pandemic.

PC: Are the students allowed to black their screens, in other words, cut off their video and just participate orally?

FD: No. The students were supposed to have their cameras on. I know a few times, if they have technical difficulties, the teacher was understanding of it if their camera was broken, or if their audio wasn't working right, they were able to have some understanding with that. But for the majority of the time [an item drops in the background]. Sorry, I have this chalkboard; I saw it was falling. I did catch that. [laughter] But most of the time, the kids had to have their camera on, and they would only want to shut it off if they were in person for class, but they would still log into the Google Meet.

PC: What you're telling me is that the kids, if thirty percent of them come into the physical building there nearer the end, and the other seventy percent are at home, they're all together, because even the students who come in have a screen and are in the Google Meeting of some form or another?

FD: Yes. Even if they come into the classroom, the lessons and things aren't any different. They're still logging on on their computer and doing most of the work virtually, but they would just shut their camera off and stay on mute because the teacher would have up on the screen everyone in the class and whatever she was presenting. For the kids at home, they would be able to see it in the building as well.

PC: What was your sense of how many of your students had adequate computer facilities to really participate in this fully?

FD: I think every kid was given a Chromebook from the middle school, so everybody did get a computer. I know access to Wi-Fi is something that could be really challenging. Even if they are given the computer, they might not necessarily have Wi-Fi at home. It seems like every kid did have Wi-Fi. I know some kids had stronger Wi-Fi than others. Some kids, their connectivity would be off, or you wouldn't really be able to hear them that well. I think that was something that made it really challenging to be able to have all the kids participate. You'd want to go call on that kid, but you know that no one's going to be able to hear them or they're going to have trouble unmuting or showing themselves on the computer, which is something that's not really fair to the kids or even us that we wouldn't be able to include them as much as we would want to because of technology. But I think we did a really good job at trying to get over those hiccups and finding new ways for them to participate.

PC: Okay. I'm more used to a high school schedule. In the sixth grade, these kids are together all the way through the day? In other words, they're all with you in "American History I" or something or American history through the Civil War, and then did they all go to the same place, I mean, not literally go, but are they all then in the same place for the next class and so on and so forth?

FD: I think it's like high school, where they go to different classes, so they all have different schedules.

PC: Okay. They may come from different "homerooms." They're bunched together somehow academically for each class that they're taking.

FD: Yes.

PC: So, you didn't get the sense that these kids necessarily knew each other really well before they walked in your door, although, sixth grade, they probably had met virtually everybody by that time?

FD: Yes. You could tell there were certain kids who were closer with others more, and you would see friendships developing throughout the semester, even though it was virtual. They would get friendly and then ask if they could be put in a breakout room to do the do-now together or things like that, where I'd still see those relationships forming. But when I first came in, it didn't really seem like a lot of them were close or knew each other very well. Then, as the semester went on, they got closer and closer and more comfortable with each other.

PC: In this sort of situation, did students ever log in together, that is, brother and sister, twins or something and they're in the same household, or two next-door neighbors who let their two kids go to class together, so to speak, or is it all one screen for one person?

FD: Yes, throughout the entire semester, it always had been just one screen for one kid. I don't think I had any siblings in my classes. I do know that there were times when I was talking to kids and you would hear their little sibling on Zoom in the room with them doing a different class, and they'd be like, "Oh sorry, that's my brother," or, "That's my sister." But none of the kids got together and went on Zoom in the same place. I don't know if that was just because of the parents' preferences, or if the teacher was like, "You can't do that," but there was never a time where there was someone logging on and there was two of them on it.

PC: They were never acting up in a way that you had to intervene? The only problem you could possibly have in this situation is when a student sort of tunes out, so to speak?

FD: Yes.

PC: You're not really managing a classroom. You mentioned you didn't get a lot of experience with this, and you're not really managing a classroom situation. Your primary challenge is to motivate them to work in something that they're getting increasingly less happy about over the course of the term.

FD: Oh, definitely.

PC: What did you find at the end of the term that you could do to sort of keep them focused on doing things?

FD: Well, one part, I guess you could kind of consider this classroom management, was the school had their own thing that they bought, this package they bought, called GoGuardian, and it let you see the kids' computers, what they're doing on their computers. So, the only thing I really had to call them out on was them being on YouTube instead of actually in class or messing around on their computers. To keep them motivated, we would try to just do different activities that they would be interested in. Instead of just presenting slides and making them

write down information, we would have them do a gallery walk on the computer, or this thing called Flipgrid, where they had to videotape themselves, so we made like a PSA [public service announcement] to Jamestown, like, "Should you or should you not come to the Jamestown colony?" and they would get really excited to make those things, which was nice. Also, if kids were falling behind, I would host office hours and then they would come and I would help them with the assignments, talk them through it. If they were having trouble finding information, I'd give them sources. It was really just kind of like holding their hands through it if I saw them falling back, which really kept them going.

PC: I'm sort of jumping around with questions, but things just pop in my head as I hear you talking. How much opportunity did you have to interact with their parents?

FD: I didn't really have any parent--I actually had no parent interaction. Mainly, my cooperating teacher just told me if things were happening with parents or when they got an email from home or having to reach out to the parent. I think I wrote one email down, where it's like, "So and so hasn't turned in four assignments. They're getting bad grades. Let's try and get that up." But I know in the fall, I will be at the parent-teacher conferences and things like that.

PC: In other words, you were basically not a part of the parent-teacher conferences that went on this spring?

FD: No, I was not.

PC: To the extent that the kids needed motivation, the only type of help you could get was to motivate them yourself. Your cooperating teacher could, but you couldn't talk to the parents and say, "Here are some things that I think might help"?

FD: Yes.

PC: Okay. That makes it a little tougher to be a hands-on teacher.

FD: Oh, yes.

PC: What was the biggest problem you faced?

FD: Biggest problem I faced? There was always hiccups along the way. Getting used to the whole virtual teaching was something that in the beginning I struggled with. I hadn't used Google Classroom since I was in high school, so just getting familiar with that technology was something that I needed to put a lot of effort in and figure out different ways to incorporate the lessons I wanted to give them into an online platform, which was something that was challenging. Also, getting enough hours during the pandemic was another thing that was really challenging. I feel like there's so many big problems that I'm like, "What's the biggest one?" Classroom, teaching-wise, probably keeping them motivated, because there were a good handful of kids who just wouldn't do the assignments and we would get in touch with their parents, my cooperating teacher would, and I'd be the one putting the grades in the gradebook.

There were some, every week, they were getting zeros and they just didn't care. Because of the pandemic, we were told to just keep pushing them along, try and make them get as much as they can do and maybe not take as many points off for being late, and I felt like it just kind of kept them as unmotivated. They felt like they can keep getting away with it, which was something that was really hard to get through.

PC: What were the things that you were most satisfied with or felt best about, as you came out of this process?

FD: I really loved when I got to teach a lesson that I made myself and seeing them really enjoy it. That was something that was really great. It felt fulfilling to see them really getting into it, and then hearing later on that they enjoyed it was great. Then, I loved when I was able to go in person, and then they would get all excited when I was there and chewing my ear off about something that happened when they went home last week. They were all just very excited to see me and would start participating more, so I really loved that part, too.

PC: Did your cooperating teacher come back physically to the school before you did?

FD: Yes.

PC: You said it was a woman. How long was she there?

FD: She actually was in the building all year, even though the students weren't. So, she was allowed to go in. Wait, am I thinking of this right? Was she in there all year? I'm remembering some days where she's at home and some days when she's in school, so this might not be a hundred percent [accurate]. I know she was a hundred percent back in the building in March. She didn't really ever go home. I think the majority of the time she was in the school building, and then she had to be there for the kids who were coming back in person in March. Then, that's when I started going in, but she was definitely there a lot earlier than me.

PC: That seems like a pretty low-risk situation if she's there, mostly because that gives her some extra control over whatever interactive materials you're using in a classroom in which she's the only person.

FD: Yes.

PC: She can open a window and it might as well be outside at that point. For her, do you know whether the protocol was that she had to wear a mask while she was teaching?

FD: Well, when she was alone in her room, I know she had to keep the windows open. I don't think she had to wear a mask when it was just her, but when the students came back, we all had to be wearing masks. We had to keep the windows open. The students, of course, had to be wearing masks. I think that was it.

PC: You were told you were going to be wearing a mask even if you had been vaccinated?

FD: Yes, we wore masks throughout the entire year, even after I was vaccinated.

PC: Just to pick up on an issue that has come up in many settings, not just education and certainly not just schools, did anybody ask you officially whether you'd been vaccinated?

FD: No one at the school asked me. I think it's because we had to wear masks anyway, and we were still taking the same protocol if we were vaccinated or not. I don't know if that's going to change for the fall, but this past spring, no one did ask me.

PC: Generally speaking, places have not asked people whether they've been vaccinated. There's some ambiguity. In completely private employment, apparently, it's legal. I'm not clear whether it's legal in public employment, and generally speaking, companies have said they don't even want people to ask each other about whether they've been vaccinated, which isn't to say it can't come up, but you shouldn't press a co-worker. I just wondered if they'd worked out a protocol, because by March, a significant number of people had been vaccinated by March in New Jersey. You were probably working around people, some of whom had been vaccinated and some of whom had not.

FD: I know my cooperating teacher was vaccinated, and she actually was helping me trying to get a vaccine appointment. She was actually very helpful in sending me links of different places I could have gotten an appointment at, because I know the teachers were all trying to get vaccinated. The school didn't really--I mean, they gave them locations that they could get vaccinated at, from what I remember, but the school didn't organize anything for the teachers to be like, "We have these appointments for you. Go here."

PC: You said you got vaccinated eventually. Where did you get vaccinated? I'm just curious.

FD: I got vaccinated at CVS. Where was it? It was like an hour away.

PC: I guess the reason I asked is because the mega center for Middlesex County, or mega site, whatever they call it, was right out, I guess it's in Woodbridge, it's that convention center, which is relatively close to Colonia. It probably was close. That was the easiest place to get a vaccine in March, early April. Then, CVSes started opening up all over the state, and appointments were becoming very easy by the end of April. Did you have to deal with any students who had real problems because they were sick, they had gotten the virus, or anything like that? Obviously, no personal details, but I'm just curious, did the virus interfere in your teaching environment in some personal way while you were teaching?

FD: I don't recall any of my students getting sick. At one point, I got sick. I'd just stay home and log on virtually. I don't remember, I think we were all still at home at that point anyway, but I did have the virus at that point, but I didn't have to miss any hours or anything because I was quarantining at home anyway. [I] just had to open up my computer, which was helpful. But, no, I don't recall any of my students having gotten sick.

PC: You probably didn't get much of this, because it would have come up more likely in a teacher conference, but did you ever sense that any of them were dealing with parents or people in their immediate household who had the virus?

FD: Not anything that I knew about. I'm trying to think. I don't recall anyone's parents having gotten it, but I also might not have just known that information because they would just log on their computers and most of them were just in their bedrooms, so they didn't really open up and say anything like, "Oh, my mom or my dad is sick, so I can't do X, Y and Z," because everything they needed was at home. But I'm sure, statistically, some kids, them or their parents have probably gotten the virus during the school year.

PC: My impression would be that it would be less likely in a high school situation or a middle school situation that you'd find out much about that, as compared to college. College professors, this last year, while not getting anywhere near a full range of information, I don't think anybody I know who taught in the History Department did not hear stories from particular students, usually explaining why they're not getting their work done, about somebody getting sick in their family, and they'd all of a sudden have this set of responsibilities they didn't have before, or them getting sick, usually with modest consequences at best, at least short term. Actually, it's probably more serious when a parent or relative got sick and they all of a sudden had to pick up a whole set of things that they weren't doing up until that point in time. Almost every professor heard more than one story about that, and I can see why you might not hear as many from the kids in a high school situation. If you were told tomorrow by the school boards in Central New Jersey, let's say, that they found it was so much less expensive--I can't think of any other reason they'd do this--to teach this way, that, "We're going to do this forever," would that sour you on the teaching profession? In other words, you would be teaching online for most of most of the time.

FD: I think I would still continue in the process of becoming a teacher. I still really did get to form great relationships with my students, even though I was virtual. It wasn't ideal, but it still did go really well. Ideally, I would not want to be online [laughter], but if I had to be, then I would still continue being a teacher.

PC: Okay. Did you have a sense that people you knew reasonably well who were going through this process felt roughly the same way, that this was bearable but not something they'd necessarily want to do for the rest of their life?

FD: Just with my friends in the program, I'm pretty sure they would feel the same way as I did. I know a lot of people in my cohort were complaining, "Oh, I'm tired of this," blah, blah, blah, but I feel like the majority would still continue if they had to be virtual.

PC: Did anybody that you knew--again, no names--but did anybody drop out because this wasn't what they wanted to do with themselves?

FD: I don't really know the details of why people left, but I know there are some people that weren't returning, that weren't there in the spring that were in my classes in the fall. People did start dropping off, and I don't know why. I do know a friend of mine did get a full-time job and

he took a different route with that, but I don't know if those people who started disappearing just dropped out of the program. I do know of someone who was tempted to because they were just so frustrated with everything that was going on and how their experience was going. He's still, thankfully, in the program though, but I know a lot of people did have a lot of things to think about because of how it went.

PC: What are you doing this summer? Life wise, but mostly job wise, what are you doing?

FD: Right now, I am working at a toddler summer camp, so it's a preschool turned into a summer camp in the summers. I work there until three-thirty. Then, I run home, and I do my to summer classes, which are so draining. [laughter]

PC: Wow. These are two required GSE courses?

FD: Yes.

PC: Do you like working with toddlers?

FD: It's different. I'm thankful that that's not what I'm doing with my teaching degree. I was tempted when I first started thinking about becoming an educator, do I do elementary school or do I do later on, and this really solidified my decision of working with older kids because it's a lot of babysitting and a lot of putting this kid's shoe on, who's hitting who, and I'm not really a fan of that. But they are cute.

PC: How old are they?

FD: My youngest one just turned four, and the oldest is seven.

PC: Okay. They're both mobile and verbal and capable of driving you crazy with all their energy. That's the fun age, but when you've got a lot of them ...

FD: They're very cute individually ...

PC: ... But overwhelming as a group. [laughter] Now, if I can remember, you've got two sisters. Is that right?

FD: Yes.

PC: One of them, maybe both of them, but at least one of them was in some ways connected with the medical profession?

FD: Yes, both of them are actually.

PC: Both of them. Have they come through all this okay, just in general?

FD: Both of my sisters, thankfully, never got sick. Things were a little more hectic. My sister was going through her doctorate program. She actually just finished for pharmacy. She was actually giving people the vaccine, and she worked for CVS, which was really cool. Now, she just got a fellowship, so she's doing all that. Then, my other sister, there were some times where she was working, and she came in close contact with someone who had COVID. That was really scary for her because she does have a heart condition. So, we would always just be on a little edge when those things would happen, but she would quickly be able to get tested and, thankfully, nothing ever came of it. But those were some times where it got really scary for her to be working in the medical field.

PC: Well, good, I'm glad to hear that. The people who are in daily contact over some health concerns, you just cross your fingers. Now we've got a vaccine or vaccines plural. I guess it's a little safer. I feel a hell of a lot safer.

FD: Me too. My mom actually works for a doctor's office too, and she said since she started this job, I think every COVID test that's come through has come back negative, which is great.

PC: Rutgers switched its policy around, and now, if you've been vaccinated, which I said I have, you don't have to do it anymore, but up until recently, if you were coming in once a week to Rutgers, which I was, you had to take a weekly test. It was reassuring but, in some ways, stupid because so many things can happen in between two tests and I don't quite see what the purpose of it was. Daily tests make sense to me or every two or three days. Some of the students, like student-athletes who were on campus, they were taking them every day, and that works. You can actually catch something when you do that. What have they told you in the GSE about what you're going to be doing next year, anything? You know what you're going to be doing, you know the specific thing that you're targeted to do, but in terms of the conditions under which you will be working, have they given you any guidance about that?

FD: I think it's really case by case for everyone depending on the school and what the school you're in is requiring of you. I know some people have gotten their placements back already. I'm 99 percent sure I'm going to be back in Colonia Middle School with the same teacher. So, I guess for me personally it would depend on what Colonia wanted of us. I'm pretty sure everyone will be back in person because we were back in person in the spring or at least a large majority of us were. So, I think it really just depends on what your school wants, and I think that's what Rutgers is kind of going with; student-teaching wise, if you're virtual or in person is up to the school you're in.

PC: I see. Since you're taking two summer courses, it occurred to me that one or more might be telling you, "Here are some of the things you should be ready for in the fall," because they've had more lead time now to think about this and see what they should have said or could have said to you ahead of time before, but I understand completely that it does depend on the local school district and all that stuff. If you're teaching sixth grade, you'll be teaching a new group of students, even if it's with the same cooperating teacher, and exactly the same curriculum.

FD: Yes.

PC: Anything else you want to recall or remember about what you've done?

FD: Not really. If there's anything more that you would like to know, my head always goes blank when it's my turn to talk or ask something.

PC: You'll get an audio of this at some point in time, and forty years from now, you might want to listen to it, and there might be something that you say, "I wonder why I didn't talk about that," and it's probably because I didn't ask you a question, but I want to give you a chance to say something about the situation. I'll ask you one other [question]. One of the things this changes, at least the way I conceive of student-teaching training, is it meant, even though you had a very good relationship with your cooperating teacher and got to know her relatively well, did you get to network with other teachers who were there? Did you get to know the principal and the middle school administration?

FD: Well, I did get to meet the principal. My cooperating teacher was great, she would walk me around the school and I would go and talk to different teachers, which was really great. When I was there in person, I would go on door duty with my teacher, and I would talk with all the other teachers, which was really helpful. So, I do think that I was given those opportunities to kind of network myself and meet a broad group of people from the school, which was great. The highest [position] I met was the principal. I didn't meet anybody higher up from the principal. But I was really happy I did get to meet as many people as I did.

PC: Did you get a sense that any of those teachers or administrators were Rutgers, had a Rutgers background?

FD: I'm sure someone told me they went to Rutgers and I know someone that went to Rutgers, but not off the top of my head, where I'm like, "Oh, I remember this person went to Rutgers."

PC: I just wondered. That's often one of the things that helps a student-teacher out if you're there and there's somebody from Rutgers and they actually may even, if they're not too old, have common teachers in their background, especially in your program. Now, Ben Justice at least has been there for quite a long time at the GSE. There are a great number of social studies teachers in New Jersey who have gone through his courses. Beth Rubin's a little less long, I think, in the program, but Ben's been there almost forever.

Okay, I think that's it. Two things to sort of wrap it up. One is I'll probably want to check back with you at the end of the first term next semester just to see how things go and what you point out is perhaps the obvious differences between how--you hopefully have good ones--about how your teaching has gone, compared to what it was like during the pandemic and your experiences in terms of fixing the things in your knowledge bank, your skills bank, that you didn't get a chance to practice in this situation.

I think I mentioned to you before, I'll try to remember, but you feel free to get in touch with me, if midway through the term, you think it would be possible for me to come out and actually observe you and it would not upset the school regime in any way or your cooperating teacher, I'll be happy to do that for the singular purpose of writing you some sort of letter that goes in

whatever portfolio you are going to put together. I've seen enough teaching so that I don't need to see somebody else, and my guess is you're going to get all the help you need. So, the only real reason for doing this--I'm always interested and curious--would be if I can help you professionally get a job. If that situation arises, and I'll talk to you about it, but be frank about it. If you don't think you need the letter, that's fine, but I'll try to remember to get in touch with you.

I don't quite know what the fall is going to be like at Rutgers. I know that I'm teaching a hybrid course and I'm re-teaching the "American Revolution" as a seminar in person, thirteen students, which is, I think what we had when you were there, in, I guess, Scott Hall. I think that's where they're going to put us. It's supposed to be a two-to-one ratio in Rutgers in the classroom; that's what they're hoping for at the minimum. Some of those Scott Hall classes are not big enough for a chair in between every student. If you've got thirteen kids, you're not really going to have thirteen kids spread out in a room that should hold twenty-six or something. Who knows? I hope we do, for their sakes more than mine at this point. Well, thank you very much. Good luck with your summer job.

FD: Thank you so much.

PC: Okay. Take care.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Transcript by Zoom

Transcript reviewed by Paul Clemens

Transcript reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 8/22/2022