Oral Interview Project: Dr. Katherine Mansfield

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HM: Okay, so my educational background-- is very odd. Um, so, I have a Bachelor’s in Biology and Chemistry.

CL: I didn’t know that!

HM: I know-- it’s, it’s weird! Um, a bachelor’s in Biology and Chemistry and a Ph. D. in English. Basically, um, I think what I figured out after I got my Bachelor’s degree was that I just wanted to be a professional student. But that doesn’t pay very well-- there’s not really a career path for that.

CL: Mmhmm.

HM: So after I graduated with my Bachelor’s degree I knew a lot of things I didn’t want to do. With a Bachelor’s degree in biology and Chemistry, at that point, you could work in a lab-- because I knew I didn’t want to do pre-Med or pre-Nursing, um, you could work in a lab, you could do research, something like that. But it wasn’t-- those things sounded isolating to me.

CL: Yeah…

HM: So, um, I thought about, like the person who, the career I really admired or the person who I really admired was my English professor. I had to take one English class as a science major and I just remember thinking like “her life was so interesting!”

CL: What class was that- do you remember?

HM: It was Victorian literature!

CL: Oh, yeah. I’m in that right now!

HM: Surprisingly-- but I think, she was just a great teacher. And I think also I majored in science because it was what I was good at in high school, everyone told me I was a math and science person, so I really didn’t think too much about it. I think because I was good at it, it was easy for me, my dad is a chemist, it was just natural. I didn’t really think.

CL: Yeah.

HM: I remember coming home and telling my family “I think I want to get my Master’s and Ph. D. in English and be an English professor!” And they were like “What? You’re not an English person. You’re a science person!” I’m pretty sure my dad said something like “Well, if you want to ruin my life” which he totally regrets now and says he never said that-- but I remember him saying that! Um, so I didn’t even know-- you can appreciate this as an English major…

CL: Mmmhhmm.

HM: I tell my high school students this and they kinda don’t get it. But I didn’t even know that-- this is how dumb I was-- that to apply to a Master’s program in English, you have to at least have minored in English. I had one class. So I had to go back, and for a year, I had to take 15 credits of English each semester.

CL: That’s…a lot of papers. A lot of reading.

HM: YES. And I tell students like, I had five English classes that I had to do all the reading for and papers, and they’re like “yeah, whatever…” and I’m like “No, no, no, no-- Like you don’t get it!”

CL: Oh my gosh.
HM: I was having to read Shakespeare plays and 16th century literature and I think I had a literary theory class and Old English.

CL: That one’s especially tough—especially if you had only gone from one class, and not really understand—Because I think it, because at my school we have a very strong Core, like you have to take a lot of different things, I know you have to think very differently for different tracks and I can’t imagine switching to 15 credit hours.

HM: Yeah, and I wasn’t taken seriously either, because all the Master’s students, all the students who were English majors, when I finally got into the Master’s program— they thought I was the outsider, like, “No, you’re a science major. You’re not supposed to be here.” Well, wait a second, I can do this. Well, it was a lot of conversations about “Well, Heather’s really not supposed to be here,” like, “No, pretty sure I am supposed to be here, I’m getting my Master’s in English, I can do this.” and what i came to figure out, why I loved English, I love writing, I absolutely love writing, I think the analysis you apply toward Literature is the same part of my brain that I used in science. So, it’s that logical thinking, analysis, it’s the same thing...it’s just a different discipline. But yeah, that’s how I ended up, with this weird background. But I think, how I use that as an educator, I’ve always taught a class at DSHA, that was one of my stipulations as Academic Dean. I always want to be in the classroom, at least one class, sometimes I taught Anatomy & Physiology, sometimes I taught an English class, sometimes I taught-- one time I taught AP Bio, a section of it. Right now I am teaching a Junior/Senior level English class, Contemporary Literature, but I always tell my students “There’s some of you sitting here who say ‘Oh I’m not a math and science person, Oh, I’m not an English person’ eh eh-- I’m living proof that you don’t have to separate yourself. Yeah so that’s-- that’s my-- that’s how it’s affected my role. I would say, at the very root of what I love about my job is that I love being in an industry, so to speak, that is all about learning. Like to me, I have this insatiable curiosity. Like, I wanna learn about everything, I think everything is cool, I wanna learn more about that and that and that, and I love learning from my students, from my colleagues, from parents.

CL: Yeah...

HM: I think it’s super fascinating. Like I try to think, what would it be like to go to a bank and be a banking person. And I know that it’s a job that’s needed and I’m so grateful to people who do it and I’m sure people look forward to that, but I’m like… I-- what would that be like?

CL: Especially when you have so many opportunities here. And well, I do remember, from my experiences in the classrooms here… it’s very, um, you may have -- I had Wendy Pawlyshyn, and she was very lecture-based, but even in her most lecture-based class you still had a lot of discussion. So I can only imagine from the standpoint now, looking forward at a career in potentially teaching, how much you can learn from talking with the students...so much, so. That makes sense to me.


CL: Can you just speak a little about, um, your, like what kind of high school and grade school did you go to?
HM: Yeah, so I’m from a small town in Iowa, so we only had a public high school. It was very small-- there were only 98 people in my graduating class, so we had the smallest class ever at Carlisle high school. And it was very-- it was definitely a mixed bag of… well, in my graduating class I would say maybe half of us went to college, half of us stayed around, worked on farms, did other blue collar jobs, took over the family business-- maybe it was like an auto body shop.

CL: Did your high school provide, like, more vocational…

HM: Not really. Because it was, um, we had a shop class, but that was a requirement. Like you, to graduate you either had to take Home Ec. or Industrial Arts. I took Industrial Arts because, you getta play with power tools-- I mean, how cool was that? But yeah, we didn’t have any A.P. classes, we had the equivalent of the advanced Biology class for seniors was like an A.P. Bio class. But you know, interesting enough, my Calculus class senior year, so that was like the highest level math class, it was all boys and maybe two girls. Me and one other girl, and that was it! And in my physics class, it was all boys and two girls. Sherri Van Dalsum and I were the only two and she went on to become an engineer, but we were the only two girls-- like all the other students, all the other females dropped out of math and science, some after, some after sophomore year, because I think you only had to go through two years, through Algebra II.

CL: Do you think that’s changed? In the school system?

HM: Yes. Yes. I know it has.

CL: I know here, for sure, there’s no question at DS, but… which is amazing, but… um, have you ever seen those-- there’s a block toy that you can buy for little girls and it’s like engineering for little girls, it’s fantastic!

HM: Haha, yes! And in high school at the time, I think I didn’t ever, um, I didn’t ever question, “Wow, isn’t it weird that Sherri and I were the only girls in like physics and Calculus” but looking back, especially being here, I think, well, I should’ve thought it was weird and my teachers should’ve thought that was weird-- I mean…

CL: It was just the norm.

HM: Yes, it was totally just the norm.

CL: It’s interesting. Yeah, I definitely think that’s changed. Um, a lot. And, uh, I, it’s also very interesting I do still see that somewhat-- the mentality-- but it’s almost as if the mentality is presented but the girls are just pushing it aside.

HM: Right. Like “uh no, no thanks.”

CL: What’s next…

HM: The goal of Catholic education. Especially for secondary schools. Um, I, I think, we have a great opportunity to engage the hearts and the minds. So, uh, yes, this is a very strong academic school. So, the minds are gonna be taken care of, so to speak. But what I think is so great about teaching in a Catholic school is that we get to engage the hearts and the souls of the girls, and they don’t think that’s weird. Like I get to say things like “Well, what about the poor? How would they be impacted by this policy decision.” Or like “How could we fight for justice in this area?” We get to do service. We have the opportunity to make that part of who they are-- to talk about, talk about faith. You know, talk about, you know in English class, a couple days ago, we
were reading this novel where the characters has an epiphany, well that’s nothing new, under the
sun, well the epiphany was like, he was trying to figure out his life’s purpose and I said “You
know, God puts each one of us here on Earth, and our goal, our journey really is to figure out
what our purpose is.” And you know, some days I think I have it, and like some days I’m like
“God, am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing?” like, “Am I using my gifts the way I’m
supposed to be using them.” Like, I don’t know some days I still question that. Like, yes! I have
gifts as an educator, I’m right where I need to be, this is what God’s calling me to do, and then
you know, you have a bad day at work, or you’re realizing, “That lesson just *bleh*” you know?
I mean so you go home and you’re like “Well, like, you know, that’s when you pray about it,
that’s when you journal about it. But, yeah, I could never talk about that stuff

CL: Well, for our point of view, when you see it in a college classroom, and my school has a
very strong Catholic character, and we’re mentioning it in my Early Modern Literature classes
and it-- I view it as limiting if you can’t talk about those things. Especially if it’s so limiting--
especially if it’s a prominent theme. So, yeah it can be very limiting

HM: Right! Right. I love how you said that, because I think most people think that it’s the
reverse.

CL: Right, that you’re putting yourself in a bubble-- that you’re constricting yourself.

HM: Right, and I think that if that’s the whole person of who you are, to pretend that part of
your person doesn’t exist? That’s-- that’s hard to do.

CL: Very difficult. And, I don’t think it can be limiting. I mean, at my school we definitely do
have non-Catholics, and we had them here at DS, and I remember really good discussions. I
remember, in uh, Female Identity, we were talking about the role of God in a novel, and a couple
of the girls had really good discussions. I think it can bring you to better understandings of the
literature for sure. That’s definitely DS, when you see other high schools, do you see similar idea
as the goal, or do you think that gets lost?

HM: No, I think, what I’ve seen from elementary schools to high schools is that, you know,
what we hear, as educators, we hear this from businesses, we hear this from government, telling
schools “You have to do a better job of training students to be 21st century thinkers, 21st century
workers. They have to be flexible, they have to be adaptable, the jobs that you’re training them
for aren’t going to exist…” I’m sure you’ve heard all this. Right?

CL: Yeah.

HM: So, we hear a lot from the outside world telling us that we have to prepare them for this
world that we don’t even know what that world is going to be like. So I think Catholic schools,
what they do a great job of, is we acknowledge “You’re right. We don’t know what that world is,
BUT, we know that service and justice and compassion and mercy-- all those things are at the
heart of it. So let’s have our students practice those skills, um, and I see that service-learning, not
just doing service, has become much more embedded.” I think at DSHA we’ve done a great job
at this-- students are asked to reflect on the act of doing service. So it’s not just, “um, okay,
juniors, you have to go out and do 15 hours of service this year” and you check off the box and
say “I did service.” But there’s this, “Why are we doing this, what is it grounded it, why are we
called to do this, how do we feel after we’re involved in service, how does it feel while we’re engaged in service? What have we learned from ourselves?” I think that that piece of it, Catholic schools get much more intentional about linking the service and the learning, or the service and the reflection.

CL: Yes, I think that’s true. And it’s-- that kind of goes into the next question of “Do you think that this has changed?” Because a lot of the things you mentioned I do think are very central to why Catholic education came about in the first place, so yeah, do you think that it has changed? Or do you think-- because it’s almost the same as with the liberal arts-- you get at the themes of what is true, and whatever changes in the world, you’ll have that. Do you think that has been carried through? Or how has it changed?

HM: Well, from where I sit, I think it has changed because I think Catholic schools, by and large, have always known having an active role in the community, doing service is important. And that was kind of enough. We’re Catholics. We serve others. That’s kind of what our team does. But I’ve seen, and I want to say in the last 4 to 5 years, a shift in this intentional “Okay, we do service. But why is it important? Or, what do we gain from it? Or, how does it really impact the community.” Because you know, Catholics are really good do-ers (sic). We’re missionaries, we’re gonna do, we’re gonna work-- we. So I think adding the reflection piece of it is something that maybe does come as natural. And I think, too, in this busy, busy world we live in, that reflection is something that’s like…

CL: We don’t have time for it.

HM: Right! Like, “I’m happy to show up and serve at the soup kitchen because I have from 7:00-8:15 to do that but then I have my next thing and I have to meet with my study group and I have to…”

CL: You’re seeing the importance of getting it done but you’re not reflecting on it.. Which I think-- we changed it my senior year here. We always had to write service reflections but we wrote them and then spent a theology class on it, and we talked about it as a class. And I think that was very important. Because you don’t realize that until.. Until you bring it up.

HM: Exactly right.

CL: This is random but do you think there’s a correlation between Pope Francis coming in-- he’s such an advocate for social justice. I’m just wondering-- you mentioned the last 4 years it’s changed. He has been such an advocate for social justice.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I certainly think recently he keeps reminding us. Like “walk with the poor, journey with the poor, love your brothers and sisters.” He’s such the people’s pope in that way. That he’s really trying to bring it back to relationships-- to have right relationships with people. So, you know that kind of focus.

CL: He’s also been more prominent, in media, than other popes. So I think people bring him up more.

HM: Well, and I think that’s-- I mean, I’ve only heard from the young people here, I haven’t heard from the young people elsewhere. Certainly the girls feel very drawn to him as a pope, because, well I’ve heard them say “He finally gets it!” Yeah, it is, and you know, the way that,
again, this is only young women, that faith and growth in faith is very relational. You know, processing in theology class, having a personal relationship with God… it may be intellectual at some point, but it’s relational first.

CL: I think you’re right. With young women it’s helpful to do that. Um, because women are so good at relational thought, that it’s a good way to process everything. Just moving on to the next one. The personal thorn in my side since starting educational studies: the involvement of state and federal government in Catholic education. I really didn’t notice it in the 12 years of Catholic school, but I have friends who definitely noticed objectives being written on the board, state objectives, the idea with Common Core, all these different things. Maybe talk a bit about that-- how you think it’s changed over the years?

HM: So, I would say, I’ve been academic dean here 12 years, and this is pretty myopic-- this is really only DSHA. I think the role the state and federal government here at DSHA is really, concretely through the Title programs. So, now there’s a law-- President Obama signed into law- - it used to be No Child Left Behind law. But on December 10th 2015, he signed into law “Every Student Succeeds Act,” the ESSA. Um, the ESSA is federal funding for basically saying that every student should have the opportunity to succeed. There’s money set aside in this big pot of money for non-public schools. Which by and large are faith-based schools: Catholic schools, Lutheran schools, etc. Some private schools but mainly, you know… And there’s four titles: 1, 2, 3, 4. And those are separate buckets of money and with each of those buckets of money you can allocate them to different things. And the way it works for DSHA is that any school in the city of Milwaukee, the federal government looks at every state, and corresponding school systems-- for us would be the Milwaukee Public School system, and it will give this big bucket of money for non-public school usage to MPS, and MPS will divvy it up to all non-public schools in the Milwaukee area. So what we use that money for is professional development. So, you know, we don’t have money to send teachers to conferences, and to help support their extra classes they have to take, or want to take to advance their learning but Title will pay for that. So, in my mind, that is a huge benefit that we use federal tax dollars to support Catholic schools-- and Title I is support for struggling students. So you can use these Titles differently and the new law really is much more generous in its allowances to non-public schools. You know, so, and this is kinda a sticky wicket-- I don’t know how my public school colleagues feel about that like “What?!” And especially in the state of Wisconsin like “We’re getting kicked around and now” I mean I never talk to public school people about this. It’s hard, sometimes there’s this “Us vs. Them” feeling, you know when I’ve gone to meetings with public high school administrators and Catholic school administrators there’s sometimes this-- it’s never unprofessional it’s just this weird tension of like, you know,

CL: I feel that in my classes. It’s-- you’re approaching it differently. In my experience, it’s good to see a way it’s being shown in a positive light. My experience has been in mainly public schools, there’s a lot of pressure there because they’re getting so much funding from the government that there’s more obligation to do what the government mandates which is hard to do on a national level, which is where the problem comes from. It’s good to hear this.
Professional development is so important in secondary education, so that’s so great to hear that that’s the relationship for DSHA.

HM: Yeah, right, right! So for instance, our, almost our entire math department is going to the National Conference in April, and I believe it’s in, like, San Diego. Some big city where they can have all the teachers. But, all the breakout sessions they go to it’s like “This is how they implement changes, this is how they implement SMART Boards, this is how they implement any new technologies with like the calculators and with graphing, this is how they figure out ‘Oh my gosh look at all these cool new ways that they use math.’” They basically, as they say, and have you gotten to go to any professional conferences?

CL: Yeah.

HM: You go there and you just steal ideas. You’re like “I’ll take this, this, and this, this, THANK YOU!” And you like go back to your school and you’re implementing stuff and trying it out. And that’s all Title money. That doesn’t get pulled out of tuition or any special fund—that’s all title money!

CL: That’s very interesting the way you phrased that. We just watched an instructional video from a traveling motivational speaker for teachers and he said “Teaching is stealing ideas.” Like, “Ooh, I like that…I’m stealing that.” So that’s funny you say that.

HM: Haha, yes! Yes. I’m stealing ideas all the time.

CL: I’m already doing it. I have a little notebook where I come up with ideas, and I have a lot of stuff from personal experience. It’s how-- I’m gonna try them and see if they work.

HM: Well, and that’s the best thing, because your students will let you know if it’s working out right away like, “okay! I will never try that again. Thanks so much for that immediate feedback.”

CL: Well, so coming from-- did you have any idea of the role of the state or federal government when you were in high school? Anything like that?

HM: You know, I don’t think that I did. And you know, the other way that I think DSHA-- you know we keep an eye on all of the, all the new science standards, the next generation science standards. There’s Common Core, there’s um, world languages, like new foreign languages to tweak, so we kind of keep track of all of that, to make sure we’re at least meeting, if not exceeding. But we also look at, like the US Conference of Catholic Bishops have all these academic standards, so we look there and say “Okay, like are we meeting or exceeding these academic standards?”

CL: Well, so I’m trying to think. DS is a Catholic-- private, Catholic school-- so do you have to follow any standards for any. What’s the accountability?

HM: Like, technically? No. But-- because we’re accredited, our accreditation organization is Advanced Ed., which is an international accreditation organization. And they require that we have standards written down that we follow that are objective outside. Like it can’t be “Well, I just made up these standards and we follow the standards called ‘Heather’s Standards.’” But we could say “We’re gonna follow the state DPI standards, or we’re gonna follow the National Standards or whatever.”
CL: And you just pick some and commit to following that?

HM: Yeah, so for like Theology department, because there’s no state DPI-- so we follow the USCCB Standards, we follow that. For everything else, we try to meet or exceed the national standards. Mainly because we know we’ll be sending our graduates to all kinds of programs across the United States. We want them to be able to compete with and distinguish themselves from their classmates, so whatever their classmates are getting in classrooms, we want to make sure they’re-- I mean we always want to make sure we meet it.

CL: Well, and that goes with the college prep. I mean, I went through four years here and I just-- my eyes flew past the ‘College Prep’ when you read it and I’m sitting in my class about a month ago, and she [the professor] is saying “Go around the room and talk about what kind of high schools you came from,” and that didn’t process to me that that’s not the goal of every high school. So tells you how spoiled I am! I was sitting there like, “I need to go slap myself.” I mean no, I was very blessed to have such an experience.

HM: Well, and I bet when you wrote that first paper, and your professor was like “Wow, you’re a really good writer!” and you must’ve said “Oh, well that’s what I do!”

CL: Yeah, I think a lot of my classmates from DS have that experience. My school did-- does bring in-- because it’s a new school, it’s about 60 years olds, it’s new, it’s private, it follows it’s own. So it brings in a lot of students who know about the school so it’s a lot of private school-- it’s a high rigorous academic standards for that. But I do know a lot of girls who say they got an ‘A’ on their first paper and no one else did. Whereas at my school they like to brag that they fail, or give ‘C’s on their first English paper to make students work for it. So everyone’s on their classpage like “I just got an ‘A’ on my first paper-- thanks Mr. Grandy!” and I’m like…

HM: “Oh, I’m not jumping in on that one!”

CL: I totally understand that. I think it’s interesting that there is no accountability, because you have the goal of students succeeding that you have the “meet or succeed” idea. What about testing-- because I was not as aware of testing as friends that went to public schools. In Texas they do a lot of testing, so what about your own experience-- do you remember testing a lot in high school or grade school?

HM: No, I think the only test I remember taking is the SAT, when I was getting ready to go to college. And here, we have, we actually have what we consider a standardized test program. Mainly because, um, so the way we see it there are really only two high stakes test: the college entrance exam, whether that’s the ACT/SAT, and that PSAT sophomore year. And that’s not even-- that’s medium stakes. Because only 3% in the country, a small percentage, will move to the level the finals and get money for that. So, so, we have, like, our freshman now, our SAT has been revamped, and EXPLORE and PLAAN are gone and now it’s the ACT Aspire, so we’re gonna have our freshman take that mainly as a practice for standardized test. What we’ll do with that test, each subject area, we’ll look at that and say “how do our students compare nationally?” We do item analysis for standardized test, so like, if the question is about punctuation and 80% of our students miss it, then our English teachers will know “Okay, I’m gonna go back and reteach use of the semicolon properly because, gosh, 80% of our students got it wrong.” So we
do item analysis for standardized test that are practice for that. Sophomore year, they take the
PSAT which is completely meaningless because it’s not scored. It’s practice, again. Junior year,
of course, is the ACT, which is the biggest one, of course. They’ll take the PSAT again, but like I
said, I always tell girls that it’s not a high stakes test because you’ll either score enough to get
money or you don’t. But it’s not a college entrance exam.

CL: Yeah, so it is medium stakes, you’d say. Um, okay. That’s interesting. And then, moving
on, I guess. Do you have any predictions for the future of Catholic schools? Seeing how they’ve
progressed?

HM: Yeah, and I think, I don’t know if it’s so much Catholic schools..

CL: It could just be educational system in America.

HM: Yeah, I only know this. I’m actually in a group right now of high schools. Um, a bunch of
high schools came together to talk about, so what we’re seeing now that’s definitely increased
since I’ve started is a rise in students who struggle with mental health issues. So, students who
struggle with anxiety, depression, those kinds of things. You know we’ve always had students,
some who might’ve had ADD, some may have ADHD, but the amount and level of severity of
students who now struggle with mental health problems have definitely increased. So this group
of high school administrators and counselors across the city of Milwaukee are basically coming
together talking, “What can we do for our students to be proactive?” So I know, just from
reading the research that universities and colleges are struggling with the same thing. That
there’s a lot of concern for mental health on college campuses. So, I think, for whatever reason.
This is what I’d be fascinated to hear from, just young people. Is it something in American
society? Like, when I think back to my high school, well there was a lot of stuff. I don’t even
think the word ‘bullying’ was around. There certainly ADHD wasn’t invented-- that’s not what I
mean, but it wasn’t diagnosed. If there were students who had mental health struggles-- certainly
no one knew about it, it was such a small minority. So, I don’t know. I don’t know what’s going
on. And part of it, we’re asking is it just the culture of DSHA? Is it, you know, high
expectations? A lot of, is it strong work ethic requirements? But, like, we have such a nurturing
environment. It’s not like it’s a military school, we’re not, like, yelling at them like “GET TO
CLASS NOW, YOU BETTER HAND IN YOUR PAPER.” So, like, what do you think?

CL: I mean, I think, at DS, at least, I think that because it’s such a nurturing environment, I
think, to a certain extent all high schoolers struggle. There’s just so much going on in everyone’s
heads, everyone thinks that they have this or that problem. I remember that. Everyone does.

HM: Okay.

CL: I think you just hear about it more at DS because it is such a nurturing environment that
girls are more than comfortable sharing it with particular teachers or CMC instructors.

HM: Yeah, yeah.

CL: So I think you hear about that more. I do notice, and I notice it from talking with friends
who are teachers, kids who are being pulled out for different types of therapies: speech therapies,
and such. A lot of it commits to our culture becoming very individualized. So, everyone is very--
not, not in a negative way concerned with themselves, but having an awareness of themselves.
More of a self-reflexiveness. I think a lot of why we know so much about mental health now, we can do that. I think at DS people are so comfortable bringing it up… which is a good thing, it can also lead to more dramatic responses.

HM: Right, right, right! Haha.

CL: I think it’s a testament to the environment, for sure.

HM: I just, I think, too. We have more students who have to leave school for extended periods of time who have to go get mental health in-patient stuff. Again, when I started 12 years ago, I mean, it was maybe 1 student every 3 years, I mean it was really unheard of. Now, I feel like we are working with students and families, we may have 5 students, 6 students a year. That, Clare, gets to be, I really like what you’re saying about individualized because then, and we were just discussing this, we were having this really good conversation the group of teachers of this one student and her counselor and she just came back to school but she’s been gone since like the third week of January. Like, not physically here, third week of January to March, what’s today? 10th? So, like, what instruction? She happens to be a student in one of my classes. I feel like I haven’t given her any instruction. Like, I haven’t seen her since January. Like, I could give her stuff to do but…

CL: She hasn’t been in any class.

HM: Right, I mean, we’re not like an online school where like I email you things and you do them and email them back. We’re a school that I want to see you, I want to look at you, I want to ask you questions. So, how do you approach that? So long story short what we ended up doing is, kinda, telling the family and the students “Here’s the situation: We can only give her Pass/Fail. We can’t give her grades for any of these classes because we haven’t really been with her.” Do we think she could only do the bare minimum-- this is a really, really smart girl-- yeah, I think I could say “Read these three books and write three papers.” But I haven’t instructed her in any of that, so it would just be a matter of completely work, checking it off your to-do list,

CL: Yeah, haha. You can’t do that.

HM: Right, you can’t make up a lab.

CL: Wow. That’s interesting. And I think that can lead into another question: so clearly, with the school, and a lot of very good schools, your objective is to instruct. It’s not just: fill out this chart, write this paper, and turn this in. So do you think, I’m just trying to think as the school system, in American-- I do know, the schools I’ve been in it’s been a lot of “Here’s your assignment for the day, get it done.” I haven’t noticed a lot of instruction in few classes. So thinking back to your own experience-- do you remember it being strict lecture or um, like, different from what you see at DS?

HM: It was a lot of teacher-led discussion with students participating. Well, you know, last year, yeah, last year. The teachers-- we got to a point where, where.. We got to a point, we saw that the times-- they were a-changing. We saw the tide coming at us. Let’s press the pause button and
talk about this-- and I can send you this document, you might find this interesting. We spent a
year-- during Red Days-- do you remember red days?

CL: Oh, I remember red days!

HM: So, once a month, during red days, teachers volunteer from every department, and I
facilitated. We talked about our philosophy of instruction. We went back to the basics and we
said “What do we think about teaching and learning? What is our philosophy as a faculty? What
do we think about instructional time?” So, we read outside stuff, we researched what other high
schools say about it. We talked about our own experiences. So we came up with this document
that was basically our philosophy of instructional time. To boil it down, we believe, as a faculty,
that education is a process, not a product.

CL: I love that.

HM: We believe that education is about the process, the process between the teacher and the
student, the student and the student, that that’s where the deepest learning happens. And that’s
why we care about attendance. We don’t care about attendance because we wanna nag you and
track you down-- we care about attendance because we want you here. Your colleagues and
peers need you here to learn, because they learn from you. You know, so why do we care about
the minutes of instruction? Why do we care about not too many assemblies? Why do we care?
We don’t care because we hate assemblies, but because we so put a value on educational
instruction and want to protect that.

CL: That’s great, and I love the education is a process, not a product. That’s great.

HM: But yeah, we took a year of red days to hash this out!

CL: THAT’S what was happening!

HM: That’s, we kinda went back to the beginning and said “What is our philosophy of
education?” You’ll find this out, and you know this now, but you’ll find this out as a teacher,
when you’re in the middle of prepping and grading and teaching it’s hard to take time to reflect
and like “Why am I doing what I’m doing again?”

CL: Another one of my classes that’s my big focus- that everytime you assign something you
say “Why is this important for my philosophy of education?”

HM: That’s great. But I will send you that! I will send you that.

CL: I would so appreciate reading that.

HM: Because I think it would be interesting to read.

CL: I agree I think it would be very interesting.

HM: I’m writing it down so I don’t forget it!

CL: Um, and then I think, well if I’m just going to go with that… I just have a couple more. One
of the topics I’d like to talk a little more on is like what you just said, movement from your own
experience- if you see a difference now from when you first started. Parental involvement. What
do you see now-- and I know it might be different because DS is very different and parents are
very involved, what do you remember from your own experience?

HM: So funny, my sister, my younger sister and I talk about this all the time. And my younger
sister is a middle school teacher in Texas. She lives in Wylie. Which is north of Dallas.
CL: Yeah I can see it on the map!

HM: She works in a Gifted and Talented something or other school in the Garland School District, but we joke about this all the time. Like, both my parents went to college BUT they didn’t take me on any college visits, they didn’t talk to me at all about college, they didn’t like, nothing. We didn’t have the internet back then-- so when students ask “So how’d you pick…” when seniors ask me “How’d you pick the college?” I’d say: “Well, I came from a family of five kids, um, we did not have a ton of money. We were very middle class, upper middle class, but very middle class. So I went with the college that gave me the most money to go there. I had never even been there. It was a Catholic college. I knew I wanted to go to a Catholic college. It was a small liberal arts college in Iowa. So that’s where I went.” And they’re saying “Oh, well that’s not a very interesting story.”

CL: Yeah, it’s not like their “Junior Night” at DS.

HM: Haha, no! Exactly. I had to fill out all the financial aid forms, I had to do all of that! Because my parents were just like “Well, you’re the one going to college...figure it out!”

CL: Do you think that was typical?


CL: So does that play into-- I was talking about this with a friend the other day. It’s almost assumed that everyone has a Bachelor’s at this point. If you’re applying for a job-- it’s-- in business, I talk to my sister, Maggie. In business, they assume you have an M.B.A. when she applies for certain jobs. That’s becoming the norm. Do you think the country has become a lot more college-minded.

HM: Yeah, I think so. And, too, I think parents feel like, my parents didn’t feel any pressure at all about telling me to go to college, not go to college. I think parents today feel like they have to help their kids make a really good decision, like there’s a lot at stake. And, to be honest, you know, like you can always transfer. If you show up at a college and it’s not working out for you or if you are at a college that doesn’t offer the major you want, you can always transfer. It’s really not a life sentence. It’s not like you’re getting married to the college and you promise to be in this marriage forever. You can sort of break up and go on to somewhere else. I do think, too, that since so many people have college degrees they think “Well, if my kid doesn’t go to Harvard, she’s never going to get a job.” It’s like “Well, that’s not really true, either. Just so you know.”

CL: It’s very competitive, when it doesn’t have to be, really.

HM: It doesn’t have to be! I heard a really great quote from a big time researcher in success: People who are successful, why are they successful, blah blah blah. He, when he got to to the conversation about college he said that what going to a good college, and he put this in air quotes, might get you is your first job. After that, you have to prove yourself on the job. If you’re an idiot, a schmuck, no one wants to work with you, you can’t collaborate, game over.

CL: Your college degree won’t do anything.
Right, it doesn’t matter where you went to college, you know. And, most people in your generation, and he was using your generation. He said most millennials only stay at a job, their first job, for 15 months.

CL: I read that statistic before.

HM: So you’re saying that I have to put all my eggs in this one basket-- I have to get into Harvard otherwise my life is over… for 15 months? Like, 15 months out of the course of a 80+ year life? That’s nothing!

CL: I remember hearing that. Mr. Lynch was very good when we were going to college decisions of always saying “You can transfer.” I know my brother went to Marquette High, went to UD, where I go, and it’s a small school, and he went onto Harvard Law.

HM: Yes! Oh my God, he was able to get into Harvard Law even though he didn’t go to Harvard Undergrad.

CL: He didn’t go to Harvard, Yale, any of that. So I think there’s so much pressure on it now.

HM: And I think students will show up here, as freshman, and they’ll think “I have to go to Princeton.” And sometimes I ask them, do you know where Princeton is? Have you done any research about it? “Well no, I know it’s hard to get into.” I’m like “Do you want to go there?” And you know what… they’re 14 year olds. What do you know about Princeton?

CL: Urgh, I remember that! You just know that it’s…

HM: Name recognition.

CL: And maybe you know about the difficult course load.

HM: And it may not be the right fit for you. Like if you’re a student completley freaked out by competition. There are girls like that here where I’m like “Oh, my gosh. I hope that you’re not getting burned out here. Like, Princeton is not the place for you.” There is good learning at great colleges and universities all across the country. There’s not five colleges you can get into.

CL: We need a banner of that to drape across the front.

HM: It’s so true!

CL: I remember that in my graduating class there were a few others who went to small colleges, like liberal arts colleges. But I was the only one who went to UD. But so many people were going to Madison, so many to Marquette.

HM: Oh, yes.

CL: There was this idea of “The schools that this is where you go to college.” And I just remember being so overwhelmed like “What am I doing?”

HM: Well, and people asking you and feeling like you have to apologize, like “No! My school is really good!”

CL: It helped that I had wanted to go to UD for so long, people were like “LoCoco’s going to UD, so it doesn’t matter.” But I remember when like, Lauren Hanna was looking at schools in Louisiana, it’s hard because I think, especially in Marquette, DS, and CMH, there’s like a mentality of there being, like 5 schools. You go to these schools if you’re staying local, if you wanna exceed expectations and be weird you go to these schools. Yeah.
HM: It’s weird. And the parents believe that too. That’s the problem. There are parents, this happened this fall, there was a parent of a freshman, who wanted to meet with me. And she got a B+ on something in English. He came in, wanted to meet with me, and was like “I hope your English teacher is proud of himself because now she’s not getting in college because of this B+.” And I’m like “It’s on one paper. You realize they don’t track every assignment. And it’s a B+”

CL: And she’s 14?

HM: And she’s not getting into college.

CL: Yeah, haha, it’s not even like a particular college.

HM: Exactly, and how do you, I have to professional and polite and respectful.

CL: Yeah, how do you respond to that?!

HM: In my head I’m like “You’re crazy! It’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard.”

CL: Doesn’t even make sense.

HM: But then I have to be a teacher in that moment and say “Well, when you applied to college did you have to submit a portfolio for all of your work?”

CL: Did you say that?

HM: Yeah! I tried to lead him to the answer of like, but he was like “Well, no…” So do you know that college admissions really hasn’t changed- that you don’t have to submit portfolios unless, maybe she’s an art student going to an art school and then it would be art, it wouldn’t be papers.

CL: Even if you were trying to get into a specific English program, you would get to choose what you submit. So that’s ridiculous.

HM: So it was kind of like talking him off the ledge. He came in here thinking like “I got to fight for my kid because it’s my job to fight for her and if she gets a B+ her life is over! And you know if he thinks that, that’s what he’s communicating to his daughter at home.

CL: Well, and that’s where the anxiety comes from!

HM: RIGHT!

CL: That’s where the pressure-- then you look at the how expensive college is.

HM: Yes! It’s so expensive.

CL: So if you feel like you’re not doing well there or not going to do well there and you also don’t want to invest all this money into it.

HM: When I went to college, I, well my undergrad was pretty much all paid for. So all I had to pay for was books and a little bit of board. I could work in the summer and make enough to pay for all of my books, all of my board, and having spending money. And buy a car! And that’s just in the summer, I didn’t have to work during the year, I just focused on my studies.

CL: It’s become ridiculous.

HM: I think my whole undergrad was maybe $4,000 dollars.

CL: I have a clear memory of Mr. Dawson telling me that sophomore year.

HM: Yeah, yes!

CL: It’s ridiculous, and I’m -- everyone at my school, a lot of their parents pay for their education because it’s a more expensive school, and I’m doing financial aid and working and
student loans and such but the idea that when you get that receipt of “Here’s your invoice for the
semester.” I’m like “This is monopoly money at this point because it’s so much!”

HM: It’s like “Really?”

CL: And that’s why I like, you’ll understand this, why I like going to a liberal arts school
because my major is so, I know what I want to do is teach, but if I didn’t, English is like “Well, I
communicate well and I write well. So.” It’s helpful that it’s not so specific that if that job were
to close, whatever your major is. I just appreciate that my school. Um. Last question then I
guess? Actually-- what did I send as my last one?

HM: The single sex. Definitely.

CL: Yeah.

HM: So in the Milwaukee area, DSHA is the only college-prep all-girl’s school. St. Joan Antida
is not college-prep. It’s like a comprehensive high school. But what Messmer HS, what other
public high school has done is they’ll have single-sex classes. So, like Messmer, started their
Project Lead the Way as “Here’s our girls class and here’s our boys class.” I know some of the
public high schools, like Homestead did one that was all-girls math class. Trying to create single-
sex classes within schools, because the research just keeps showing. I mean it’s been decade and
decades that girls especially really benefit from the single sex education. That it helps with
everything from confidence to identity to sense of purpose to intellectual formation, the support,
the sisterhood that you get.

CL: I didn’t appreciate it when -- I mean I wasn’t against it, I…

HM: You just take it for granted because that’s what you’re in..

CL: The second I got into my first classroom I was so grateful for DS.

HM: So what was that like?

CL: It was, so I went into freshman year at DS very shy. I didn’t talk to anyone. I wasn’t going
to participate. At all. And then, I don’t know what happened but obviously all girls, there’s way
less pressure in a classroom. I remember Mr. Lynch telling us the idea of the “Alpha Male
Mentality” in the classroom, and I remember going to freshman year “Literary Traditions I”
opening *The Odyssey* with my class that was predominantly guys. I was in a special section for
students who had taken four years of classical languages. So, we got assigned a professor who
taught English and Latin so he could talk to that more. I was one of, like, three girls. And I was
the only girl who talked the entire semester. My hand was up in the air, I was fine having the
conversation, and I could see the girls being intimidated by the class. It’s your first week of
classes, and I was intimidated to a point, but for me, it was definitely the confidence with
participation.

HM: Well, and just being like, this is what I do. I’m Clare LoCoco, as a student, this is how I
behave, as a student. I’m engaged. I participate. This is just what I do. I’m not going to be
someone different because…

CL: Because there are boys in the classroom. What I’ve noticed too, doing my observations in
various co-ed schools, and um, the girls are carrying little makeup bags around at 13 and
worrying about what they’re wearing and I just know we take it to the extreme at DS with the
messy hair, but it was so nice not worrying about that in the classroom. I definitely appreciated
that in class, for sure.

**HM:** Well, it’s funny because my daughter is in 8th grade, she’ll be coming here next year.
She’s at Holy Family. She was just complaining last night, like “URGH. I can’t wait to go to
class next year at DS because I feel like the boys suck all the attention from the teachers. It
drives me crazy.” And I was like “Tell me more about that.” And she said “Well, they either
acting up or misbehaving, so the teacher has to tell them to settle down, or they want to be called
on all the time that the teacher constantly calls on them. After a while I get sick of it so I just
give up. Like fine, fine. The teacher’s going to call on Kevin, or Ben, or Ethan, whatever.” And
this is in Math and Science.

**CL:** Well, it’s interesting, there’s a Catholic school right next to my University, called The
Highlands, run by Regnum Christi, it’s a private school. What they do is through fourth grade
co-ed, and then 4th-senior year is single-sex classrooms. Lunch, recess mixed. A couple music
classes, so that they have interactions. And I do see a difference in a 13 year old in that class and
a 13 year old somewhere else. No participation. I feel bad for the girls, I notice girls who are
participating who get, um, teased, for being outspoken in class, by the boys. It’s definitely a big
difference.

**HM:** Sooo interesting.

**CL:** I’m, like, the biggest advocate for single-sex education, now. And I swore I would never be
that person, and now I’ll be sitting with friends and talking about schools and try to sneak in
“All-girls schools are better: confidence, identity of the females. But okay, sure. Who have I
become?”