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Interview with Master teacher Tanya Channell

Janice Collins

Fort Hays State University

Joan Dunn

Fort Hays State University

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INTERVIEW WITH MASTER TEACHER

TANYA CHANNELL

Masters Project Proposal

Presented to

Dr. Allan Miller

Fort Hays State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of Educational Research

ACES 803

by

Janice Collins and Joan Dunn

December 5, 1990

CHAPTER II

TRANSCRIPT

JD:

Today is Friday, October 26, 1990. We're here to interview Master Teacher for 1989, Tanya Channell. My name is Joan Dunn and this is Janice Collins.

JC:

Mrs. Channell, would you tell us about your family background?

Tanya Channell:

My father is a civil engineer and because of that we were forced to move around the country a lot. We made lots of moves when I was in elementary school and junior high school so I had the opportunity to go to school in Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota. I attended many schools. I'm the oldest of three children. My sister is also an educator. My brother is a chemist. My mother has been a secretary or a bookkeeper for most all of her life. I am now married to John Channell, who is a teacher and coach at Hays High School. I have three children. Robyn is 25. Stephanie is 23, and a son, Ryan, who is 5.

JD:

What influenced you to go into education? Was there any particular teacher that set you on this path?

Tanya Channell:

Well, I don't think I went into education like many people. I think I went in for lots of wrong reasons. When I went to school, girls had two things they were really kind of expected to do. You could be a teacher or you could be a nurse. When I went to college, they required me to declare a major and I really didn't want to do either one of those two things. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I did declare education as my major. I attended school for two years and was married. We adopted two beautiful children and then I went back to school when the girls were two and four. I finished my degree in Elementary Education and also finished a degree in Elementary School Counseling. It wasn't until I really got into schools that I really learned to love the field of education. I think I went into it because I really didn't know what else I wanted to do to start off with, but after I got into it, I found out what an exciting profession it is.

JD:

That's interesting, I guess I didn't realize that choices were that limited for women.

Tanya Channell:

Well, I felt like they were in my school. I even felt the counselor in our high school worked a lot with the boys, but I don't remember him working with the girls

very much. I think I was on the edge of the time when girls were finding out that they could do other things. I'm really excited about that now and really encourage them to look at all their options.

JD:

I think we're glad that you did decide to go into teaching.

Tanya Channell:

Well, I'm really glad I did too.

JC:

Mrs. Channell, would you describe your first teaching experience?

Tanya Channell:

I started teaching in Hays at Roosevelt School and taught first grade there for seven years. It was a wonderful learning experience for me. I had the opportunity to work with three other first grade teachers. We had a team of four other teachers and we worked together very closely. We shared students. We shared ideas. We were continually working to improve our programs and it was just an exciting kind of a program for me to be in. I especially wanted to teach in the early childhood years because I wasn't very happy with the early childhood teachers that I had had personally. I guess I had an idea that it could be better than that and I really wanted to find out if it

could be. So, first grade was something that I found I really wanted to do and I found it so exciting to teach beginning reading. The students came to me not ready but just on that threshold of being ready to read. It was fun to be able to teach them and watch them learn to read. Then all those doors opened for them because as soon as they learned to read they could read for their interest. They could read for their creativity. They could read for science. It was just exciting to watch that happen and so I love teaching reading.

JC:

You had a very good experience.

Tanya Channell:

I really did. It was wonderful. I had supportive teachers all around me and I think it's so important that teachers learn from one another. The very worst thing we can do is go into our classrooms and shut the doors and isolate ourselves. The very best things we can do is create support groups in schools and share ideas and piggyback ideas off of one another, from school to school, and from school district to school district. I'd really like to see more of that happening.

JD:

After those first seven years of being a classroom teacher, what made you decide to go into administration?

Tanya Channell:

I was really interested in creating a different kind of school. The schools I had attended were all very, very highly structured, domineering kind of teacher type schools. At Roosevelt School, I entered a different kind of teaching experience. It was much more child centered, but I felt it could even be more child centered than what I experienced there. I felt like the only way that could be created is to take on the role of administrator and work very, very hard with teachers to create a school that would be very much child centered, and meeting the needs of children. That's really why I went into administration to see if that could happen.

JD:

That brings us to the next question where it says in the Code of Ethics of the Education Profession that one of the principles is the commitment to the student. Could you describe how you interpret this principle of commitment to the student?

Tanya Channell:

That's very important because I think that sometimes in education, we have a tendency to do what's easiest for us and by us, I mean what's easiest for teachers, what's easiest for principals, what's easiest for custodians, what's easiest for bus drivers and many times that's not necessarily what's best for children. I think we need

to constantly be looking at. "Now wait, what is best for kids?", even though that may not be best for those of us that are working with the children. What is best for the children involved? Someone has to be the child advocate. Someone has to be in the school saying, "Wait, that's not best for kids and let's look at that again." I see that as the role of an administrator.

JD:

I think that's very important because we do expect so much of the kids. We're always looking at those end results. We're sometimes more concerned with them just reaching or being able to get these test scores when there could be better ways to accomplish that goal on the child's level. I think that's really where you need to start.

Tanya Channell:

Well, I think it's important that schools meet the needs of children. I think we need to be ready for where the kids are, instead of constantly thinking the kids have to be ready for first grade or ready for second grade. We as educators need to be ready for the children that come into our classrooms wherever they are and be ready to meet those needs. That's certainly not an easy task. I never want to indicate that it is because it's very difficult. It's hard for teachers to do that and they need lots of support while they do that.

JD:

Well that's right, when you have a classroom that's eighteen to twenty-six kids, and each child is at a different level.

Tanya Channell:

That's right.

JC:

It's really important.

Tanya Channell:

They're different academically, different levels emotionally. There's a whole lot of things that go into meeting needs of kids besides just content. Many times, I think we've got to meet those emotional needs before we can get to our content needs. If kids come to us hungry, frightened, afraid at school, insecure, low self-concept, we've got to help that child feel good about himself, feel comfortable. Feed them if they need to be fed or whatever it takes before we can teach reading and math and social studies and science. So, that's a real important concept there.

JC:

What are some of the ways you use to motivate your students?

Tanya Channell:

I think motivation of students is one of the critical areas of education and we probably don't spend enough

time on motivation. We spend lots of time on content, what we're going to teach and this kind of thing. If you cannot motivate students as an educator, it really doesn't matter how much you know about science or how much you know about math or how much you know about reading. If you cannot motivate students, you're not going to be able to be an effective teacher. Every child has a different kind of motivation need and so it's important that teachers really know their children. They really need to know what kinds of things will motivate them. For some children, if they're interested in trucks and cars, then you go with that. Some children are interested in animals and then you find things about animals, because through that motivation you're going to be able to teach the concept you need to teach. Another thing about motivation I think we forget is an excitement, creating an excitement for learning with kids. I do not believe you can do that if you set a child in a desk for six hours and give them worksheets to do for six hours and expect to have a motivated student come out of that. I just don't think that's going to happen. I think we really need to bring activity centered ideas in for children. They need to experience their learning and through that experience and learning they're going to become motivated. I'll take for example a science experiment. If you take a

child, put him in a class with science materials and let him explore and try things, they make a hypothesis and they decide or predict what's going to happen and see what does happen and then write that up. They're going to remember that. They're going to be excited about that concept, probably forever. If you give them a book to read on that very same thing and say, "Read this chapter, answer the questions at the end."

JC:

Boring, right?

Tanya Channell:

Very boring, and we've found, studies and studies have shown it's just not effective. They don't retain the information. It decreases motivation. It makes them think science is boring, where it's not at all. We do that in many, many areas. I've watched over the years that kind of teaching happen. I watch kids learn to hate school. It saddens me because I think learning is exciting and I think the best thing we can do is to help kids understand how exciting learning is.

JC:

Because they're going to need so much of it anyway.

Tanya Channell:

They are and we're lifelong learners and that's another thing we need kids to know. We're learning all the time. Many times I think teachers think they need to

know everything there is about a subject before they present it to kids. I don't think that's necessarily true. I think you can get in there and learn right with the kids. Many times we cannot, an elementary teacher cannot be in every science concept, in every social studies concept, in every math concept. There is just no way they can physically do that, but they need to be prepared to go in and open doors for kids, go right through the door with them and find out about things.

JC:

What discipline methods do you find are most effective in the classroom?

Tanya Channell:

Discipline is a really easy thing for some people and a really difficult thing for others. I've watched teachers over the past several years in discipline and it's probably one of the most difficult things to teach that someone doesn't have. It's a feel for kids. When you walk into a classroom, if the kids know that you care about them and you're excited to be there and you have all these things to offer them that day and to participate with them that day, you're going to have very few discipline problems. Discipline sort of takes care of itself if the teaching is appropriate. Now, let's separate that from emotionally disturbed children. That's another whole kind of a topic. Discipline and

emotionally disturbed children don't always go together. Teachers need lots of help in dealing with the emotionally disturbed children that they may have in the classrooms. That's quite different from just regular, average kids that come into a classroom. Those kids can be a handful too if the teaching methods are not appropriate. But given that, they'll be fine and there won't be discipline problems. On the other hand, children that are truly emotionally disturbed may even have problems within that setting. So sometimes that's a hard distinction to make for teachers. I do not agree with any kind of discipline that puts kids down. I think teachers have to be very careful. They can't be sarcastic. Children have very sensitive feelings and many times it illicit from them a hostility and does just the opposite of what you would like for that to do. They end up having more problems instead of less problems with that. The very best thing you can do is to talk with the child quietly and say "Hey, are we having problems today? What can I do to make the situation better?" Sometimes you need to pull them outside of the room and just visit with them, sometimes after school, sometimes at recess. Many times when you find out what's going on with that child, you'll know what changes need to be made to make that an okay situation. Discipline is a very hard thing to teach

teachers about. They need to observe that they've got to have this personality about them that lets kids know that they're glad they are there and they like kids. If you don't like children, you're not going to be happy in a classroom and discipline probably will be a problem.

JC:

It will come across like that, that you don't like them right away.

Tanya Channell:

The kids pick it up really fast. They know right away and many times it happens they even know if you're insecure. For example, if a substitute comes into a classroom, a little insecure, the kids pick that up so fast and then will take advantage of that situation if possible. So, substitute teaching is a very difficult thing to do. Those teachers have got to have lots of personality, lots of ideas. Keep things moving in that classroom and just pretty quickly in order to get them through the day without having problems with kids.

JC:

Do you think discipline problems have changed dramatically today from what they were in the past?

Tanya Channell:

I think they've changed dramatically. I really do. I blame much of that on television and the effects of television on children. They watch so much violence.

They watch so much rudeness, so many put downs, and that seems okay. They've done so many studies with children who they've shown them violent things on TV then watched them play and that's exactly how they play. So, I very definitely think that we are dealing with a very different child than they dealt with thirty, forty, fifty years ago. A very different child and I think as educators we have to know that's the way things are. That's the way the world is now. How do we make the best of that situation? Educators must be models. I think it's essential that they model what they want to see, cooperation, kindness, consideration for others, respect. They must model that and constantly work with children to help them develop those skills, because television certainly isn't helping that situation at all. We need to let the children know that school isn't an appropriate place for that.

JD:

These views that we're carrying over, are they then going to internalize them, and carry them back home even though the situation at home doesn't foster those same values?

Tanya Channell:

I think for the majority of children that works. I really do. I'm always surprised at how effective schools can be, even with children who have a home

situation that's very contrary to that. Somehow children seem to know. Deep down, there's some kind of thing that they know that probably certain behaviors aren't okay and other behaviors are. I really believe educators can make a big difference in the lives of the children that they teach. I really believe that and I guess if I didn't believe that so strongly, I'd become discouraged at times with some of the things that we do need to deal with kids. I believe we can make a difference and we have to believe that too and when we walk into that classroom everyday we have to know that, "Hey! Here we are! This is going to be the best six hours and twenty-two minutes of our day", and go from there. So, I really feel teachers can make a difference.

JD:

I think a lot of times that six hours and twenty-two minutes is probably a stable part of the child's life. They know when they come to school who their teacher's going to be and what the situation is. That is probably a stabilizing force. When they leave school and go to different parent's houses or friends, that will help carry them over.

Tanya Channell:

I really think it does. The one thing about school, we can have some consistency here and sometimes kids don't

have much consistency in their lives. It's really great that we can help out here and that we can provide a really caring, kind of environment for those children. I've worked with children that did not know that every daddy didn't beat up the mommy every night. They really thought that happened in every house. Unless they know that probably there are other ways to deal with differences and disagreements, where else are they going to find that out, if not in school? I think it's really important that we model these or other ways we can work out differences. It's never okay to hit and those kinds of things. So, even though they have to go back in that home, they know there are other options for them. I think it's important that we give kids lots of options.

JD:

We're looking at the role of a teacher helping incorporate these values. What types of qualities or traits do you look for in your teachers?

Tanya Channell:

Boy, hiring teachers is a really, really hard thing to do because I'm looking for this perfect someone that can do everything. Luckily I've found lots and lots of those, that we have some wonderful teachers. The very most important thing, the number one thing that I have to have is that child centered person. That person that

cares about kids first. So, I've got to somehow structure my questions and find out about people and how they feel about kids, because that's got to be there. The next thing that has to be there is an excitement and enthusiasm for what they're doing. They've got to really believe that they can make a difference and they've got to be excited about that. They've got to have all kinds of ideas about what to do. They need to have confidence in their own abilities, because so much is asked of them that they can't go in and be insecure and not be confident. They've got to be confident. On the other hand, they've got to be always willing to learn and always willing to change. They've got to have some flexibility. They can't be rigid or structured. Our kids are going to come to us from here to here in ability. They've got to be flexible and be able to move with kids. That's an important quality and some people don't have that. If they don't have that, they need to know education probably isn't going to be their best career choice.

JD:

Especially with centering your activities around the needs of the children, you definitely need to be a flexible person just to adapt to that.

Tanya Channell:

Many times you might have a plan for the day and you've always got to be ready for that teachable moment. because something may come up. Most kids need to deal with that right now and the teacher's got to be ready to do that. Sometimes your lesson plans don't just go according to plan. You definitely need to know what you're going to do when you go in for the day, but you can't be so rigid that you can't move from that if you need to. Another quality I look for in teachers is an intellect, an ability to learn always and to know that we're just at the beginning of knowing about education and about how kids learn and about development of the brain and all of those kinds of things. They've got to be really interested in continuing their own education as well as working with children. They also have to be able to get along well with others. Some people do a beautiful job with kids, but they've also got to be able to get along with parents and other teachers and lots of give and take there. So, we've got to have that kind of a personality also. You can see I'm really looking for a lot of things when it comes time to hire a teacher.

JD:

Out of all those applications, are the majority of teachers, after they've received the present teacher training in college, prepared for current teaching

positions?

Tanya Channell:

Well, I'm kind of excited because teacher training institutions are starting to take a look at their training and realize that their training was probably very appropriate, twenty or thirty years ago. With the student we now have, we need to train teachers in a different way. They're starting to look at that. I'm very excited about that. Most of the teachers that I would hire are coming to me with more and more training in effective schools research. They know lots about how children learn so, I'm encouraged that I'm seeing more and more of that in the last year or two.

JD:

When you are confronted with any particular problems, whether it's with the personnel or school policy, what types of strategies do you use in reaching decisions?

Tanya Channell:

I always try not to make a decision too quickly. I always try to give myself a little time to think about it and just leave my options. If it's a particularly difficult problem with a staff member, a parent, a child, I try to get some other people to work with me on that decision. I might call on some of my fellow principals. I might call on staff members if it's a child. You know, "Let's get together and brainstorm

what we can possibly do with it." I might call Fort Hays and talk with the psychology department. I might try to get other resources as well involved in our community. Definitely not just make that decision myself. I try to incorporate as many other opinions as I can. Ultimately, I'm the one that has to make the decision and live with it, but I do try to provide lots of opportunities for input before I come to a decision.

JC:

There must be a lot of stress involved being in administration. How do you handle stressful situations?

Tanya Channell:

There is a lot of stress being involved in administration or teaching or anything that has to do with people. I think the number one thing you have to have is a sense of humor. You've got to have a sense of humor and I tell my teachers that you've got to laugh and you've got to see the humor in situations. You've got to enjoy one another and enjoy the kids and the people around you. That's the only thing that's going to get you through many of the things that you have to get through. Luckily for me, I really enjoy every day I come to school. It's just a joy. I mean I can't wait to get here. I love it and that makes it really enjoyable for me. I try to make it enjoyable for people that are around me as well. When things become really

stressful, that's the time when the humor has to kick in and you've got to do that. Another thing I do is read. I used to read fiction and I love fiction. I love biographies. I love mysteries. The last eight years I've had very little time for that kind of reading because I've been studying so hard -- educational journals, research, everything in education. But the one thing I do read that's not connected with that is lots and lots of positive books on positive thinking. I read lots of books on the role humor plays in health and wellness. Lots and lots of positive attitude kinds of books because I think it's so important that I keep a positive attitude. I keep myself straight so that I can help the people that are around me do the same. So that's really how I handle stress. I would like to say that I exercise and I run and I do all those things, but I really don't. I think about doing those and I know I should and for my own health I should. I just never seem to take the time for that. The very most enjoyable thing I can do is spend time with kids. You can't be around them two minutes without seeing humor with kids and so that kind of always relieves my stress. It works for me anyway.

JC:

Some good ideas.

JD:

You are the principal of the newest school in the district and I know that you were very instrumental in some of the changes that are taking place in this school. Could you elaborate on what makes Kathryn O'Loughlin McCarthy Elementary School unique?

Tanya Channell:

It's exciting because it's a once in a lifetime opportunity to start a school from scratch, to develop a program from the beginning, to hire the staff from the beginning, people that are excited about the project. Together we are building it. We have some major differences here. Number one, the entire program is sequential. The teachers work together to make sure that they don't constantly repeat things. As principal in a school, I would go from classroom to classroom and everyone was teaching teeth for health. Everyone was teaching pilgrims for Thanksgiving. As I went from class to class some kids had it last year, this year, and the next year after that. So I sat down with the staff and said, "There are so many wonderful things that we can work on. Let's not all work on the same thing." So they are constantly planning together to make sure that they don't repeat things. They repeat important things that kids need. It's not to say that we don't review, we do. But we don't start every class with an

indepth study of dinosaurs, for example. We have a grade level that we do that at. They can do it at other grade levels, but they do it at a different level. We tried really hard to do that. Another thing we have is an entire school using a literature approach to reading, a language approach. We talk about whole language and we definitely are not whole language purists here, because we use lots and lots of different methods, and I think that's important to know. For every child you have coming to school, you have a different learning style walking through the door so it's important that we provide lots of opportunities for kids. We use children's literature. I find that to be an exciting way to teach reading. I have taught reading not using children's literature and I've worked with teachers that are now teaching it with children's literature and I could never go back. I could never go back because kids are so excited about the books and they will read things really beyond their ability to read because they have the desire. "I want to read that book." That's an exciting thing to watch happening. We still teach phonics within the content of literature. We still teach phonics and we teach all the same skills that we would teach through the basal. We just go in through a different door. Our mathematics program is very different. We have really taken the projections and

recommendations of the standards that were given to us from the National Council of Mathematics Teachers and are implementing their standards K-5. We are using manipulatives in math. They are taking children from the concrete to the abstract. We are not just teaching math facts in isolation. They are learning the concepts behind everything that they memorize in mathematics. That's an exciting thing to watch happening as well. I know we are not going to see great test score gains, except maybe in mathematical concepts. But I know when our children reach middle school and high school and they're into the higher level of mathematics, they are going to have a good solid base of mathematical thinking for them to build on. I'm very, very excited about the math program. We do not use workbooks. We do not use fill in the blank worksheets. Our children write everyday from the time they are in kindergarten. Now when they start, it's lots of scribble and, "Tell me what your story says." Then they move from that to letter formation. They move from that to word formation until they are writing sentences and putting that all together. Our kids will be writers when they leave school. I have no doubt about that. With the workbook formation, they learned to fill in the blank. They didn't learn much about sentence structure. We are really working hard in the area of writing, and that's

exciting to watch. Social studies and science, we have managed to take exciting concepts in social studies and science and make that very boring for children. You know, read the chapter and answer the questions at the end, is not going to excite kids. So our social studies is exciting, because we are learning about communities. We are learning about people. We are learning about countries. Each classroom has taken a different country to study. Then we are going to have a sharing time. I believe it will be in April, when we all share what we have learned about our country in different ways. The kids are going to experience those countries and as they move from grade to grade they are going to be able to immerse themselves in another country. Social studies will become alive, I think, because of that. We also do an enormous amount of current events. Children need to know what is happening in the world and how that is going to affect them. So each and everyday in every classroom we work on those concepts. "So what's happening in the world? Where is Saudi Arabia? Where is all this and what's happening and what does that have to do with us? What's happening in Germany right now and why is a unified Germany going to have an effect on us?" I want our kids to know all those things and be comfortable with those concepts. It's very different with that respect.

JD:

With television, they see all these events going on around the world. We don't live in isolation in Hays, Kansas. It is neat that they can realize how these other cultures live, and how what is happening in Saudi Arabia is affecting the gas prices at the local gas station. I think there are those relationships that they can understand.

Tanya Channell:

Very much so. Another thing we are trying very much to do is integrate our curriculum, so that we don't teach reading here, phonics here, spelling here, English here. We pull that all together and integrate the whole thing. If we're teaching Indians, we read about Indians, we write about Indians. That's going to be our English, our spelling. That can also be our social studies; that can be everything all rolled into one. So we can see that everything affects everything, that affects everything, that affects everything. That is what education is all about. We have really segmented it. I think that has been a mistake. I would like to see it all put back together, and what our part is in that relationship and how it affects us. Ultimately what is meaningful for kids is what they are going to do to me, or for me in that relationship. For example in math, I am asking my teachers to do the majority of their

mathematics as problem solving, word problems, actually putting those skills to use. It will be much better if you use their name, their classroom, their community. A word problem that comes out of a book just doesn't have that much meaning to kids. You need to make learning meaningful. You do that by making it closer to them. We are constantly working together to see how to make it meaningful for us and our kids.

JC:

What are some of the issues facing educators today?

Tanya Channell:

I think that this is the most exciting time to be in education that there has ever been. I just think it's wonderful. I'm concerned about the criticism that we get, but I see that as a real positive thing. I think that we need to constantly be reevaluating our program and seeing, "Are we meeting the needs of our kids?" That criticism is okay, because it keeps us on our toes. I think finances is a critical issue. We've got to have the finances available to us for the materials we need to do the job we need to do. Finances are important. I think it's too bad that teachers aren't paid for what I feel they should be paid. Considering the responsibilities they have and the amount of work that they do, they are not nearly reimbursed financially for what they should be. I think the majority of teachers

go into it because, not for the money obviously. They go into it for another reason, because they want to help people. It's a helping profession. It definitely is. Just like nursing, or being a minister or something like that is a helping profession, so is teaching. But in all honesty, there are other helping professions that make more money than educators do. I think that's a problem for them, especially when you look at a teacher, as a woman and a second income. That's not fair to say that. For one thing we're having a real hard time getting any men into education and we need them desperately, as well. They need to be able to afford to be there, but so do women. For doing an equal job, equal pay is important. I really want women to know that their job is important and what they are doing is just as important. But we desperately need men in education and they kind of pull back from that. I would really like to get more men in, especially in this day and age where we have so many single moms raising their children. We do not have enough male models for kids. They just aren't there. In education we need to provide for it, and that's very difficult. We have lots of issues facing us. I think the mathematics program in the United States is critical. If we are going to continue our position as a world power and are going even to compete in technology, our educational program

has got to be excellent to do that. We've always had an excellent educational program. The United States has a beautiful education program and I'm saying that we've just got to continue that. Continue to move and improve, and not sit back and think that we've got it made. We've always done it right, we're just going to sit here. I think we've got to continually look at our program. What can we do differently to make it better? What are the needs of our kids going to be? When I look at our six and seven year olds and I try not to see just what the world is like now, because that is not going to be the world for them. I try and think, what is it they are going to need? What is it that they are going to need to be successful? Mostly I read and read and read, and try and find out from the people that do know or have a better idea than I know, about what is going to be happening in the future. I try to incorporate their ideas into our educational program. I think one thing that is going to face educators is early childhood education. Kids are in daycare centers. The majority of our children these days are not with mom, home, reading to them any longer. I've seen kids come to us that do not have a language base and the experience base that they need to be successful in school. Mainly it's because they haven't had the stimulation that they need. As educators we are going to be needing to be involved

in that, because at five years old, it's too late to change. It's the same way with many inappropriate parenting things that have been going on. We get a child that comes to us with all kinds of problems. We're there to try and fix them. It would be a whole lot easier to prevent those from happening in the first place. We need to go into a strong parent education program, a very strong early education program working with parents and children to know what are appropriate things for kids and what are not appropriate things for kids. I think educators have to be really active in that. I think we have to be super concerned about child care in our country. You can't just sit back and wait for five year olds to come to us and think that everything is going to be okay. It's not. We have many, many inappropriate child care situations. Now Hays, Kansas is lucky. We have really nice, neat people keeping our kids. We need to make sure that continues. We have to be concerned with the kids in Chicago, New York, St. Louis, and Kansas City. We can't be concerned about just our own little world. We've really got to think beyond that. Our social studies curriculum is critical because in order to continue in a global economy we have to prepare our children for other cultures. It isn't going to be very many years and the white, middle class child is not going to be the

majority any longer. They need to know that and look at that and think, "Okay, that's the way it is. What do we do to deal with that?" I think language is important. I very much believe that we need to be teaching languages at the elementary school. Kids pick it up really quickly there. It's an opportunity to broaden their horizons, to prepare them for other cultures and that kind of thing. I think that we have many, many issues. I think that children are victims in this society. I think as educators, we need to be the leaders to see that it doesn't happen. I honestly feel that we have more children physically, emotionally, and sexually abused today than ever before. I'm not one of the ones who say it is just reported more often. I think there is so much use of drugs and alcohol in the world today that we didn't have that kind of extensive use twenty, and thirty, and forty years ago. That use causes people to abuse kids. I see many, many children in the role as the victim. It distresses me a great deal because, as I spoke earlier about being a child advocate, "Who is going to be the advocate for the child?" I think educators are going to be the ones placed in that role. It's okay with me, because somebody has to be and I think these kids need a whole lot of protection. We need to be active in making sure that conditions are okay for them.

JD:

What has been one of the most difficult challenges you have faced in education?

Tanya Channell:

That is an easy question to answer because it is educational reform. I think I saw lots of things that needed to be changed, and wanted to see things happening in schools that weren't happening. I was given the wonderful opportunity to try out things in this school, to do that. There are lots and lots of folks out there that haven't seen that and don't agree with that. It puts a great deal of pressure on to not do anything different than has ever been done. We talk about peer pressure for kids, well adults have peer pressure as well. It's difficult to go in and be a change agent. It's a very difficult role to play because people don't want that to happen many times. They are secure in the way things have been. They feel that it has worked perfectly fine in the past, and it has. They don't see why they can't just continue that way. I would say that educational reform, and being a player in educational reform has been the most difficult task that I've ever had to face in education, and that I continue to face everyday.

JD:

That is one of the things that we hear in the studies of

our children at risk. We hear how our educational system is not changing, and yet that is one of the most difficult things that we are facing. The research says this would be a better way to do it. Yet it is hard to make those changes.

Tanya Channell:

It's very hard and I don't think that we should jump from one bandwagon to the next. I know there have been a lot of educational trends that have come through, but none of those trends has ever been based on very good research before. I also think that no matter what method you use in teaching, the teacher is the key person. The kids are going to learn if they have a wonderful, excited teacher. The method they use is not nearly as important as what they're all about, personally and educationally. The way we train our teachers and the kind of people we recruit into education is critical. If we get the right kind of person in there, educational reform is going to be much, much easier. We'll get the kind of people that I talked about before -- flexible, eager learners, ready to make changes if changes need to be made. I feel really sorry for people who have had to go through this whole span of watching children change. It's had to have been difficult. People who didn't have televisions when they were young have a hard time understanding kids, who have

TV as their main source of information. It's difficult to be in their shoes and I think we can never forget what it's like to be a kid. We've always got to have one shoe still in that kid's shoe, and be a little part kid to be really effective in dealing with children, to know, "Hey, this is how it is to be a kid." That doesn't mean that we accept everything that they come to us with. We may not think that some of those things are okay, but through the understanding of where they're coming from, we're going to be more effective in dealing with them and showing them another way. That generation gap needs to be decreased as much as we can to be effective with those kids.

JD:

Like you said, if you know where the child is coming from, that's really the first step in being able to help them and teach them.

Tanya Channell:

It's really hard. One thing that really happened to us is that we were middle class, secure little kids. We had breakfast every morning. We had dinner every evening. We had our mom and dad home. We had all those things. It is difficult for us to really relate to children that come to us without all that security that we had. We have kids who don't know who is going to be at their house, or if there is going to be anybody at

the house when they get home at night, or if there is going to be any food when they get there, or how they are going to be treated when they get there. That's a scared kind of thing for a child, but it's hard for us to be in those shoes. So we've got to really work to find those things out. I think that one of the best things we can do is give home visits. I believe we should go home with those kids some time to their house. Not that we are condemning what it looks like, that's their house. That's okay. I tell my teachers lots and lots of times, we can not expect kids to row our boat. We've got to teach them how to paddle in their boat. They have an entirely different outlook and entirely different life from ours. We need to teach them how to be successful wherever they are. That doesn't mean we're trying to make them all just like us. That would be a big mistake. We couldn't do that and we shouldn't even try to do that. We need to teach them problem solving skills, management skills, all the skills that they need to be successful in their world, whatever that world is.

JC:

This is a question that appears on all teacher applications. What is your philosophy of education?

Tanya Channell:

Well, I think you have probably heard most of my

philosophy of education because my philosophy of education is that it needs to be a child centered environment for kids. We need to be there for kids. We need to make the adjustments that need to be made to make education work for kids. One thing that happens with kids that I very much disagree with is that we make decisions about them very early. This child isn't a good student. This child doesn't get along well with people. This child has problems in reading. Then we give that message to kids. I'm not good in math. Then it becomes a mind set. They make a determination about themselves, and remember the way they made that determination was from people around them. They are usually a product of what's coming in. We can't take all the blame for that, because we have parents and siblings and classmates that are putting some of that in too. We need to be very careful that we help parents understand that a five year old, a six year old, a seven year old, even an eight year old is too young to make any big determinations about whether this kid is not going to be a student, or not going to be this, or not going to be that. We need to keep those options open constantly and give them the idea, "You can be successful. You can be what you want to be." That is critical. They've got to have a mind set of confidence in their own ability or they just can't be successful.

I think that's my philosophy of education. You've got to help kids know that they can learn and they can succeed. It does take a lot of hard work to do, and we need them to know that too. Even though you're a capable kid, if you don't put forth effort you are not going to be okay. Then you have got to let those kids know that put forth all this effort and still don't get an A, that it's okay. Effort is wonderful and they will learn. It may take a little longer, but they are going to get there. Give them lots of confidence along the way and lots of support along the way.

JD:

Do you have any future plans? You are in administration now. You have been a classroom teacher. Are there any future educational plans? How long are you going to stay in education? What do you still want to do?

Tanya Channell:

I have so many things that I want to do that I will never get them all done, and I've always had that. You know when I said that when I went into education I didn't know what I wanted to do, I'm still like that. I have gobs of things that I would like to do. There are career choices that I would want to do, other avenues in education. I have more things than I will ever be able to do. The main thing that I always know or that I want you to know is that I've always enjoyed everything that

I've ever done. I enjoyed being a teacher. I enjoy being a mom. I enjoy being a principal. I enjoyed every job that I've ever had. I was a car hop at the A&W. I thought it was the most wonderful job that I ever had. I loved it. Every job that I've ever had, I've really enjoyed doing. So I take one day at a time and try to make it the very best day for myself and for those around me that I can make it. I'm excited about the future of education. I would like to continue to work in the area of educational reform. I would like to continue to help others. I have so many people that call me from other communities and other towns that say, "How can we do something in our school?" They see the need to make a change. I would really like to be working with educators that are interested in making changes. I never ever want to be in the position of forcing anyone into making changes. That never works. It is important that we don't do that. People have got to come along as they feel good about coming along. Forced changes just never work. The people out there that are excited about doing something different and want to know about that, I would really like to work with them.

JD:

You may be packing your bag and being on the road.

Tanya Channell:

Sometimes I do that, I go from town to town when people call me to come in. I do that from time to time. It's hard on my family, because I have a five year old, a little guy that needs me too. I am always constantly pulled. No matter where I am, I always feel that I should be at the other place. If I'm home, I think that I've got all these things to be doing at school. If I'm at school, I think I need to be at home. I'm always constantly pulled. I think every working mother is in that position. Only people in that position understand how that feels, I guess, to constantly have that conflict. It's always there and it never goes away.

JD:

You handle it the best you can, knowing that you are giving your best at home and as the principal.

Tanya Channell:

That's right. I try and give everybody the best I can. I guess I never really feel like I do as good a job at anything that I could. I've always felt like that. As a teacher, I felt like I could do that better. Next time. I'll do this, this, and this, and I think I can do a better job. I am always constantly striving to do that. If I did this differently and this differently, then maybe I could do a better job. I'm constantly striving for that. Never, ever, have I done it and

thought, that was perfect. I've got it. I never reach that point. I don't think I ever will.

JD:

You mentioned that education is a continuing process and that you never reach an end.

Tanya Channell:

That's right. The more you know, the more you know you don't know, about education, about any concept you are trying to teach. It can be really frustrating because the more you study, the more you know you don't know. So you need to study even more, I guess. But at some point, and I tell my teachers, you can only do so much. You have to take care of yourself as well. That's important for them to know because they are very hard workers. They need to take care of themselves too.

JC:

In closing this interview, do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

Tanya Channell:

If there was one thing I could do, I think I would like to go out into the world and recruit educators. I think so many people pull back from it not knowing what an exciting, rewarding, fulfilling profession, education can be. I also need them to know that it's not for everyone. You know it's not. There are some wonderful, neat people that would not make good educators. But I

would also like people to not cross education off their list, thinking that there's too much pressure, that there are too many hassles. There are all those things but the rewards are tremendous. I can't begin to tell you how many rewards I've had in education.

JC:

Mrs. Channell, we'd like to thank you for sharing your views and ideas on education and your time in giving us this interview.

Tanya Channell:

You're welcome. I've enjoyed it.