

1 Transcription of Oral Interview

2 [JS: John Schaffer, interviewer] [BC: Bernadine Clark, interviewee]

3 JS: Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. My name is John Schaffer and it is
4 2:06 PM on March 20th, 2020. I am with Bernadine Clark and we are having this conference over
5 the phone due to the recent coronavirus outbreak. I wanted to clarify that I am going to record
6 this interview, and it will be uploaded to the UD Oral History Repository. Is that alright?

7
8 BC: That's alright. That's great.

9
10 JS: Okay. Just to start out, can you give me a brief outline of your educational experience, as
11 both a student and a teacher? It can be as short or as long as you would like.

12
13 BC: Sure. I grew up in New England where education is a top priority for a lot of people. I grew
14 up in a town where the majority of my neighbors were involved in universities of some kind or
15 another. We lived twenty miles from Harvard, five from BU, probably about six from Boston
16 college, and that was just a familiarity that I thought was the norm, where people were talking a
17 lot about education and were involved in education. As a granddaughter of immigrants, I was
18 definitely part of a culture that stressed the fact that education was the way to kind of integrate
19 oneself into American society and culture. Also, I had parents who were very much formed by a
20 Jesuit model of education and parochial education, so very much a Catholic education, that was
21 quite selflessly given to immigrant families. That was really formative. At the same time, my
22 own education as I started to go into school- I went to public parochial, private Catholic, and
23 then private independent prep schools up through high school. Then I got into college, deferred

24 for a year, went to school in Europe for a year, and I went back to college. I also taught at the
25 Cambridge public schools and then went back to grad school, so a lot of time in education, and
26 also teaching along the way. It was just a natural fit to try different schools. We have a number
27 of teachers in my family from different generations, and teachers were always highly respected
28 and revered and spoken of with kind of a sense of, “wow, they’re a teacher and we’re so grateful
29 for what they’re doing.” It maybe even took leaving New England to see that that wasn’t- and
30 New England can be a little bit over the top about this, in terms of the competitive aspect of what
31 bumper sticker you have on your car, but also I just assumed a lot of people were like that, and
32 that was a surprise to me when I started to live in areas where that wasn’t definitely the norm. So
33 then I got into teaching a little bit. The first one was a little bit- I had always been tutoring, just
34 because people would ask me because I was a geek, and then doing CCD and things like that, but
35 also got into teaching really because someone was desperate for a teacher in the Cambridge
36 public schools when I plugged into that for a short time. And then as a grad student, you know
37 you teach, and then when my husband Mark and I, our first- I guess I was teaching before that
38 actually, I forgot about that- gosh, there’s a lot more teaching I realize I was doing. I was
39 teaching as a writer, I pursued a career as a writer, and that turned into a writer-in-residence gig
40 at an all-boys private school in DC. And yeah, so just lots of teaching and then my husband and
41 I, when we were first married we ended up at a boarding school, so I just couldn’t get away from
42 it, I guess. Yeah, I married a teacher. Yeah, I could keep going, and since then I think I’ve
43 worked at- I may have the count wrong, but I think I’ve worked at twelve different schools, and
44 that’s been really cool to see some secular, some Catholic, some independent, some public. Some
45 very, very different emphases and demographics, and then I’ve consulted for schools, so that’s
46 been kind of cool to see.

47 JS: Right. I'm very interested in- you said you went over to Europe for a year? I think it's very
48 interesting the difference between kind of a European style of education and the history of
49 American education, and how American education has been influenced by European education
50 and kind of what has grown out of it. What do you think, if at all, is there a relationship between
51 the two that you saw? Did it influence your ideas about American education in a different way,
52 that kind of having that experience of the European lifestyle?

53

54 BC: Yeah, it did. I think- now again, I was a young person, and not having access to a broad
55 range of all the strengths and weaknesses of all the European models, and now I see some of the
56 strengths of it, particularly for research and things, but I did experience some of the immediate
57 differences. And again, coming from a really, really great prep school experience where you
58 were, the idea was you're going to launch, you're going to try different things, you had a lot of
59 access to your teachers, and you had open access to libraries and you went to libraries all the
60 time. I found that the Spanish model, which was pretty similar to a lot of the European models:
61 really narrow to access, you had to know exactly what discipline you were in. I mean, I think the
62 moment I remember most distinctly was not being able to go into the stack, and I was thinking,
63 "what do you mean I can't go into the library, I don't know what book I want until I wander
64 down that." And you had this little piece of paper you had to request the book, and I remember
65 thinking, "I have no idea what the book is, I know some of these topics." And you know the
66 lecture- it's very, very lecture heavy, and a lot of one-way teaching, which was just really, I
67 thought it was very different, and teachers were far less accessible. Certainly you can go too
68 much to the extreme in some of the American schools and we all know the silly stories version of
69 that, but I did find that there was also a lot of understanding among my peers in Spain, and I've

70 seen this in France, that you probably wouldn't make it in your program. You'd do a couple
71 years and you might get funneled out, but you'd try, and then you'd have to switch and switch.
72 But then, on the other hand, if you committed to one thing that maybe you had had to decide that
73 at age fifteen or sixteen, you didn't change. You know, you didn't go from being, "I'm interested
74 in law," to, "I'm interested in journalism," or something like that. Again, Americans can go way
75 too much the opposite and we all want our options open, but that definitely hit me as a surprise.

76

77 JS: Okay, so you're talking about kind of the difference in that it's very, very discipline-oriented
78 over in Europe, and it's very much you kind of have to know where you're going, maybe even at
79 an early age. And right now, you're teaching at a school, Chelsea Academy in Front Royal,
80 Virginia, where the liberal arts is very, very highly regarded, and a liberal arts education, a
81 common core kind of deal. Do you think that that prepares a student in a way, if at all, that
82 differs from most modern methods of education?

83

84 BC: Yeah, I think it not only prepares a student, but it builds a society. I think not having
85 common knowledge, common texts- really the way to break down what we could have in
86 common as people, the questions we're asking, and we could be talking past each other,
87 especially as the disciplines develop their own language.

88

89 JS: Okay, so it's an own language kind of thing, and it's the idea of do you believe that education
90 is really trying to build a citizen more than it is a human being, or kind of the other way around?

91

92 BC: I think both, I mean a human being is going to be a citizen in something, you're not in a
93 vacuum, and I think that you can't separate it, yeah? And I think you're going to make mistakes
94 and you're going to have limitations, but if you don't go for something in common, you risk
95 having the Tower of Babel.

96
97 JS: Okay, so you want something in common. Do you think that there should be a mandated state
98 curriculum then, in a way, or do you like the idea of having more privatized education, more
99 localized education?

100
101 BC: Well, I'm really, that's really going beyond any kind of great knowledge I have and that's
102 really talking about personal preference. I tend to not trust any kind of government mandate
103 unless it's that we all know a certain degree of knowledge about our own country or something
104 like that, but I think that whatever forces one could use to encourage people to choose
105 excellence, you know having the leaders of the community really set that standard. I tend to
106 probably go for that more than saying, "the government's going to be good to do this," at least in
107 our current model of how it would seem. And my experience is with very well-meaning, very,
108 very well-meaning people in public education just creating programs that don't work.

109
110 JS: Right. So, kind of going off of that or trying to go off of that into your personal area, to what
111 extent do you really enjoy teaching, is it something that you feel is- I'm sure all educators feel it
112 is necessary to a certain extent, but to what extent do you enjoy it?

113

114 BC: No, I feel it's a calling, I really do feel like writing and teaching was something I've been
115 called to do and privileged to do.

116

117 JS: Okay. So you have a background in children's literature, kind of talking about your writing,
118 and given that, how, if at all, has children's literature- do you think- changed as a genre over the
119 years?

120

121 BC: Sure, yeah, and it has. I think that the commercialization of children's literature is really
122 something interesting to track. The way it's been distributed is really interesting to track. I
123 worked- I think the anvil dropped on my head one time when I was working on an adaptation of,
124 we were developing a story for the song "Baby Beluga," which is a Raffi song. Now we will
125 both have it in our heads for two days. But it's a sweet song, and I was working with a company
126 that- and again, this was a company that, this was a commission, this wasn't me waking up and
127 going, "I want to do a 'Baby Beluga' story." We thought about developing it into some sort of
128 story, and I don't remember what the medium was, it may have even been more of a video than a
129 book, but it really- what was really interesting was the reason the whole project died was that
130 Raffi said, "no, you cannot commercialize this and be selling little Belugas in your happy meal."
131 And it was so fascinating to me, I really certainly respected him for doing that, because it was a
132 multi-million-dollar deal, but also I just thought, "my goodness, I just don't that Robert Louis
133 Stevenson had to worry about that." A "Children's Garden" would be printed at Starbucks and
134 put on little tabletop coasters or something, so it made me realize that so much of the
135 consolidation of media affected literature, for sure, and it went both ways. Suddenly, books- I
136 mean, I thought it was a joke when "Hello Kitty" became a storyline. That's a brand of

137 something, I don't know what it was a brand of initially, but that was hilarious to me, and so that
138 has been a big change. I think the other- I think there's been some good changes, I think seeing a
139 diversity of writers has been really, really cool, I mean I've loved seeing writers I had never
140 seen, you see that more and more. I think a great deal has to be- I think if I have any heroes in
141 children's literature, it's children's librarians. I think they're just tremendous curators, I think
142 that they- my children's exposure to some of the best books had a lot to do with the collections
143 that happened to be in the towns we lived, and we lived in towns that had fantastic children's
144 libraries. You know, there are books that I can't even necessarily track down now, because I just
145 remember pieces of them, but I remember thinking, "I would never have found those if it had not
146 been for that librarian." And I think that when I see the books that are getting thrown away,
147 that's a little bit sad, because it seemed like a lot of the collections were quirkier and more
148 eclectic and more diverse over periods of time and subjects. There's definitely homogenization,
149 and a lot of people are buying their books at Costco and Target, and the supply chain for that is
150 not the same as a children's library.

151

152 JS: Given that, it seems like you were talking about how- I don't want to put words in your
153 mouth- but there are positive and negatives things that have happened?

154

155 BC: Yeah.

156

157 JS: So given that, how do you think the shift has affected children and the development of
158 children as a whole, especially you talked about parenting your own children and how it affected
159 them.

160 BC: We were pretty countercultural because we did- you got two geeky parents and we did
161 homeschool, and we were in a community where that was pretty normal for the kids' early years.
162 Again, I think of it as, what is the vehicle by which kids are reading, right? How are they getting
163 books, how are they reading books, are books even quaint to a lot of them? I think parents- I
164 think everyone's really busy, also, you see people grabbing whatever is on that counter, I don't
165 mean to be repeating myself but I think that that has changed in terms of then the kids just have
166 fewer choices, even though they might feel like they have more choices because, "oh, you've got
167 a book from all these different places." It seems like it's kind of the same for a lot of them. And
168 you see it with a lot of the series, there's this kind of, "well, if you like one, you'll like 400 of
169 them." That also seems a little bit of dimming of the imagination, but I do think that there's also
170 been some new great children's printing houses and publishers and things like that, and that's
171 been kind of cool, and I do think that the attention that's been given to illustrators if I'm thinking
172 of kid's books, I think that's been a good thing.

173

174 JS: Okay, I find it very interesting you talked about especially the dimming of the imagination
175 within the child and how really imagination can be brought down a level in modern society. Do
176 you think that that's true- I don't mean to be asking a leading question.

177

178 BC: No, there's no question about that. I had a sort of a great- this isn't a critical mass, but if you
179 were going to create a lab to check this, I had a class at one of the schools I taught, not the school
180 I'm currently at- so I had two classes back to back but it was the same class, and one was not
181 officially kind of a standard and honors but it kind of turned out that way. And when I would do
182 the same assignment with one group- I think it turned out that way because one of the other

183 classes that was scheduled was sort of standard and honors, if that makes sense, so by default it
184 sort of ended up that way- and I remember, this was so interesting, that in one class, and again
185 these were just two groups of maybe twenty kids each at the most, maybe fifteen. And the class
186 that had a harder time writing, especially when it came to imagining things, their reference points
187 were all TV or Disney characters. It was fascinating, and the other ones had even reference
188 points from their own lives, it wasn't as though all their reference points were literary or artistic
189 or anything like that, but their slots for types or whatever they wanted to do were not all Disney.
190 And now this is pre- video games weren't a big deal then, I think it's gotten even more so with
191 video games. But I definitely think the 'businessification' of a lot of stuff has been really not
192 great for kids' imaginations.

193

194 JS: Do you think it's that way, you say that it's been not great for kids' imaginations, do you
195 think it's that way because they're not having more experiences, they don't have a varied
196 experience of their one outlet is kind of TV or videogames or is it just because the inherent
197 quality of TV and videogames, that kind of thing, that's affecting their development?

198

199 BC: That's a really good question, I don't know enough about the medium, you know, but I do
200 think that when you get the image, song, and story all in one packet- I think if there's a way, you
201 could almost think of it as a drug, or drug in a positive or negative sense. Just when you get all of
202 that, I think it does- I don't know how you study something like that, but I would posit that that
203 definitely doesn't leave as much room for the child to kind of make up the difference and hold on
204 to his or her take on things. And for example, I don't see people making up backstory, and
205 maybe kids are, maybe I'm missing this, but I don't see them spinning off. I know there's stuff

206 like fan fiction and all that, but I don't see little kids going, "well what if Elsa was born in
207 'blah,'" you know, or I just don't see it being a point of departure for more imaginative stuff, I
208 see them reliving those stories or being those characters, and that's probably really great, but I
209 don't know that it then leads them to their own creations.

210

211 JS: Sure. Okay, so you've been talking about the diminishing of imagination, especially in
212 children, and kind of going back to your teaching experience, I think that teaching gives a range
213 to many informative experiences, discipline within the classroom being one of them- it's an
214 interaction between the elder and the youth and relationships also with educational staff,
215 administration. How have these experiences within the field of education affected the parenting
216 of your own children, or, if at all, have they at all?

217

218 BC: I don't know if my kids would have a different answer than I have, certainly lots of guinea
219 moments. Yeah, I feel really- I think the privilege to have homeschooled (which is nothing I
220 ever, ever, ever, ever thought I would've done) blurred the line between what I thought education
221 was and, to some extent, parenting; and that's also a pain in the neck about homeschooling,
222 because there's times when you want to say, "can I just be a parent," and you're still saying,
223 "let's finish that lesson," or what have you. But I do think that it broke down, I think, some of
224 the false barriers between school and how we're always teaching our kids, and that was a good
225 thing. I think, and I hope, it gave me greater empathy for my kids, just having had the privilege
226 of working with more kids, and seeing that they come from different places, and then the other
227 way around, I know it helped me as a teacher to think about my children's experience and their
228 friend's experience and all that sort of thing. So I think in that sense, as much as that is true, and

229 I know that this is true for everyone I talk to, having had great teachers as a child myself
230 certainly made me think about- some of the lessons from my teachers actually applied, I applied
231 them as a parent, you know, I remember one particular one was that I had a teacher who was just
232 really, really, really steady. I remember thinking- and everyone, it was only after high school that
233 everyone- there was some sort of poll or something where everyone asked- it wasn't like, "who
234 was your favorite teacher," or, "what teacher made a big impact on you," and I had a lot of
235 teachers with big personalities in my high school, and he wasn't one of them. And I remember
236 thinking, "wow, everyone in that- and especially in those preteens and teen years, they really
237 appreciated how fair and steady and predictable (in the best sense) he was. I remember thinking
238 about that, I can remember that as a parent, that's really interesting to me. I'm sure I failed a
239 million times but, you know, the effort was there.

240

241 JS: Right, well I mean, teachers of all kinds, it's filled with mistakes and learning. Can you speak
242 to the said benefits and/or detriments of homeschooling that you've seen, especially in your
243 experience?

244

245 BC: It's great to have that bond with the kids. It was great to use the place in time, the setting in
246 time that we were at as a basis for education, you know again, so that education wasn't the box
247 you walked into and then walked out of, that was all good. Again, we have two teacher parents
248 with teacher relatives and a lot of teacher friends who were doing this, so we were in- I don't
249 know what it would've been like if we were way off the grid, or something like that. We were
250 always part of something where you could swap ideas and the kids could be in sports and cultural
251 activities and things like that. I think that as they were doing things such as sports and music, it

252 was especially beneficial because they could- oh, you can hear the basketball going in the
253 background- you know, they could do that in a way that was really kind of healthy. I think we
254 only homeschooled until fifth or sixth grade, depending on the kid. I do think there can be
255 drawbacks to homeschooling, I've seen them. I think you can- this can happen with any kid, but I
256 do think that sometimes you can- I know the negative sides of socialization, I could really make
257 the argument for why socialization is not a positive thing, but I also think that some of that
258 'rough and tumble' and ability to just go with the flow and things when you have a bad day- I've
259 seen this teaching some, definitely not globally with all homeschooling kids but I do think you
260 can develop a little bit of a brittleness, or a sense that you're the center of the world in a way that
261 school can put things in a more healthy proportion, if that makes sense. I also think it takes a lot
262 of discipline on a parent to not let a child just do the things he or she loves to do, and not some
263 other imbalance with some homeschooling kids I've taught, where they're (and that's no fault of
264 the parents, they just couldn't do it all)- but they just tended to stick with the things they liked
265 and then ended up with some real deficits from there. I believe in standards, and I think for
266 homeschooling you still have to figure out what your standards are going to be. So they may not
267 be the SATs, but they have to be something.

268

269 JS: Right. I thought it was especially interesting you mentioned sports, things like sports, things
270 like- I think you said music, and potentially theater, drama; that even when you're in a
271 homeschool environment, you still kind of push your students (your children) to involve
272 themselves in that, and that kind of is a socializing aspect. Given that, and given your experience
273 in a non-homeschooling environment, just a normal school (whether private or public), do you

274 think that there is any correlation, or what is the relationship between academics and sports or
275 academics and the arts?

276

277 BC: Are you there?

278

279 JS: Oh, yes, hello?

280

281 BC: Okay, some of that cut out, but yeah, the correlation between sports or other extracurriculars
282 and education?

283

284 JS: Yes.

285

286 BC: I guess that seems really self-evident to me, so I probably believe it more than I even know.

287 To me it's a given that one should be exploring those things and creating opportunities for the

288 kids, for art and music and sports and theater. And it's hilarious (and I have been a poster child

289 for this) how it can turn into the over-scheduled life, of course things can get crazy. But I think-

290 and this is where I think it's really- it dovetails into another question which is- I think tapping

291 into excellence in any field gives you a sense of what excellence is, period. And those are areas

292 where, you know, I will never be a great athlete, but being on a team that was pursuing

293 excellence at that level of a secondary school was completely memorable, and understanding

294 what that was, and what that was in relationship to an Olympian version, was a really cool thing.

295 And similarly with music, or with art, or with theater, just that commitment to doing something

296 really well, or even if you're not going to be the best at it, I just can't emphasize how crucial I

297 think that is for- again, it brings about the question of society, because you begin to understand
298 what that means, to be a part of something larger than you are.

299

300 JS: I think that's very insightful, and I agree especially- well, I guess this isn't my opinion, but I
301 think it's very interesting that you talk about kind of socialization, especially in the context,
302 almost of what you were saying earlier with common core, and that it's kind of training you to be
303 a social adult, a human person- that you kind of bring out these understandings, philosophical
304 ideas within sports, it's not just that you're training someone to be an athlete, it's that you're
305 training them to understand certain things.

306

307 BC: No, I mean you could do video aerobics if you just wanted to be fit. I mean if you're home
308 and- and I'm definitely not, and I know you're not, talking about the Common Core with two
309 capital Cs.

310

311 JS: No, yeah.

312

313 BC: We're talking about a common core, right.

314

315 JS: And especially going off of that, you teach now at a Catholic school, where religion is very
316 important, it's very infused within a common core, you know, a liberal arts education. Do you
317 think that a religion class, in general, is important for a Christian/Catholic education, and why or
318 why not?

319

320 BC: Oh, absolutely, and I'd probably call it Theology, not religion, because we are talking about
321 the study of Theology- I think it's especially, I can probably speak better about this from a
322 Catholic point of view, because to be Catholic is to know reality, so if you don't know how our
323 tradition and how the Catholic intellectual tradition has developed and then how the Church has
324 grappled with all of the questions of what it is to be a human being, and what it is to be on this
325 journey towards (ideally) ultimate sanctity, then what's the point of any of it? I was really
326 pleased that someone came down and had our students read "Learning during Wartime," I don't
327 know if you've read that, the C.S. Lewis, it's like, why should you study during wartime, well,
328 why should you study at all, because we're all going to die. It's just this great C.S. Lewis
329 sermon, it's very short, and it just puts it in exact perspective, because if you don't have that,
330 then for one thing, why bother? And for another thing, why not just study for yourself? Just, I
331 don't know, be the best juggler because you really like juggling, or find the fastest way to get the
332 most toys before you die. I also think there's just so much to learn, there's no way you could do
333 it without a course as an integral part of- you know, I've taught CCD, it's really hard to do, to
334 teach Theology in one day a week. There's just so much, and I don't feel like I'll ever begin to
335 scratch the surface, and I'm sure every Theology teacher feels the same teaching their students. I
336 think we've lost a sense of how serious a discipline Theology is and has been historically.

337

338 JS: Right. Do you think it should be necessarily, I mean you say that you think it's obviously
339 very important in the academic field for students; do you think it should be necessarily a separate
340 class, should it be a separate class and also be infused into other disciplines, how should that,
341 kind of, should they meld together in any way?

342

343 BC: Well, I guess you're talking about a university that is somehow faith-based, right?

344

345 JS: Right.

346

347 BC: Yeah, I certainly wouldn't require it for people who don't have any faith, but I do think that

348 philosophy would be really good to have for everybody. Yeah, no, absolutely, I think there's lots

349 of models, I know that there's one model that we've had fun looking at the various orders and

350 how they've developed their schools, the various Catholic education traditions. Theology is

351 always going to be inherently- going to have an inherent tension between instruction and

352 formation. And every class does, to some extent, you know, math, but Theology really has it,

353 right? So finding that happy tension is important, but yeah, absolutely, I think that when your

354 intellectual development is going forward and you're dealing with complexity in your literature

355 class or in your physics class, and your understanding that the more you know the more you

356 realize you don't know. And at the same time you're dealing with a third or fourth or maybe

357 eighth grade religious education, I think that's unfair to any student. I think you have to

358 understand that the Church, people in the Church and philosophers, have grappled with these

359 questions, and why not give everybody the tools to see where they've gone with their answers or

360 more questions.

361

362 JS: Right, and I think you're talking about not only at a Christian or Catholic education, I think

363 there is a direct correlation between Catholic Theology and a classical education, you know,

364 traditional. It's very heavily based in that kind of thing. Do you think that, in any way, if at all,

365 classical traditional education should be infused with practical education of any kind?

366 BC: I think if you're- yeah, and I think it's really- the terms drive me crazy, right, because what
367 are we talking about? As a language person, you're like, "ah, I don't know." Same with liberal
368 arts, you could get caught up in exactly what's what. I do think that by- if you are creating a
369 Catholic educational institution, you're automatically going back to the roots, so those roots are
370 automatically going to go back to the very first sources of wisdom, so it's just kind of a given. I
371 don't know how you'd do it otherwise. I wouldn't know how to construct that without saying,
372 "yeah, it would be good to go back to the first people who ever asked these questions within our
373 tradition, and the people they were drawing from."

374

375 JS: Right. Kind of going off of that, or kind of switching gears a little bit back to your experience
376 as a teacher, and specifically an administrator. You have a lot of experience as both an
377 administrator and a teacher; do you think that, necessarily, or how, if at all, is the experience of
378 being a school administrator different from the experience of being a school teacher?

379

380 BC: For sure, for sure. A school is a particular institution in a particular time and place, and
381 that's true for a class, I think there are very particular needs, just organizational needs that an
382 administrator has to make sure to be sensitive to and manage in a way that in a class you can,
383 you don't necessarily have to be as aware of. I mean just practical things, right?

384

385 JS: How do you think- can you speak to the relationship between the teacher and the
386 administrator, and how that comes about?

387

388 BC: Sure. I always feel in whatever administrative role, whether it's in communications, or
389 fundraising, or faculty development, or more supervisory things: the administrator is really there
390 to make the teacher able to do his or her best job in the classroom, and if you've brought
391 someone on board, you've already- you're helping them understand where the school is going
392 and what the goals are, but more than anything you're just creating a framework so that they can
393 do their work, so they can do their particular job, and they don't have to worry about a lot of the
394 other stuff. That's sort of how I always saw the administrative role, like, "okay, you don't have
395 to worry about if the lights are going to stay on, you don't have to worry about whether-" You do
396 have to, you know, a teacher still has to be thinking about things like admissions and retention
397 and all that, but not necessarily tracking data or something like that. And in terms of mission, I
398 think that the administrator is certainly the guide and the tone- the person who sets tone, but what
399 I've found inevitably, it wasn't as though the administrator had to, I don't know- the teachers
400 were always a great source for manifesting the mission, and so it wasn't as though you had to be
401 coming up with this mission all the time and setting words to it and singing songs about it, it was
402 just you had to create enough channel so that when a teacher does something- and this happened
403 at schools with very different missions- when a teacher does something that really, again,
404 manifests the mission, you set- they're going to share it with you or you're going to see it or it's
405 going to be a talking point of some sort. And so that just, it's just a lot like a family, right, so
406 stuff's going to generate its own healthy culture, versus just sort of either top down or confused
407 or one where the teachers are going in one direction and the administration is going in another.
408 As I say this, I'm envisioning kind of like a blueprint of how those channels work, and that's
409 what I think administrators do.

410

411 JS: Okay, so you're talking especially about kind of manifesting the mission, if- I don't mean to
412 put more words in your mouth, but that kind of idea for the administrator, and curriculum is tied
413 directly to the mission and what the school has chosen for that. So do you think it is- in any way
414 is it the teacher's job, or is it the administrator's job, or someone else's (maybe) job, what are
415 your thoughts on choice of curriculum to enable that mission of the school, and of education in
416 general?

417

418 BC: Yeah, I think the school needs to know exactly what it's trying to do, so that when, and so
419 at- most schools have, are working with some kind of curriculum, unless you're talking about
420 ".0," where do you start, right? And once you know exactly what you're trying to do, are you
421 trying to make sure kids are ready for college and going to be sane, or some mission like that,
422 then you're going to kind of work backwards. The ideal faculty has people who are well-
423 prepared in their disciplines, so they're going to help inform that curriculum, but I think that that
424 is very much is the role of the, of either- depending on how the school is set up, depends if
425 there's a president, or oftentimes there's sort of an academic dean or an academic curriculum
426 team, or something like that, that's really keeping track of that. But I think if you have your
427 mission clear, and you create enough space for the individual teachers to play to their strengths,
428 and you know that those teachers are staying current in terms of (not necessarily like the latest
429 book or something like that, but) knowing different pedagogical tools, or just different ways to
430 understand if you're doing a good job, all those things which I think there are some great- there
431 has been some great progress in things like that. Then I think what's the more challenging part is
432 not that system and that framework, because I think that's pretty easy to set up, I think it's the
433 system by which you keep track of it, you evaluate it, and you really dedicate time to seeing if

434 you're accomplishing what you think you're accomplishing- that's where I think the rubber hits
435 the road.

436

437 JS: Right, okay, so you're talking about assessment, especially.

438

439 BC: And accountability, and evaluation, yeah.

440

441 JS: So especially going off of evaluation and assessment, I think there's a huge debate among the
442 educational field right now about the legitimacy and efficacy of standardized testing. What are
443 your thoughts on- especially as someone who has been an SAT prep person, like a coach, what
444 are your thoughts on standardized testing?

445

446 BC: Well, I think it's a necessary evil. I think it's necessary, first of all. I think the current SAT
447 or ACT is a necessary evil to some extent. I'm also part of the Classic Learning Test world and
448 really like that they're trying to create an alternative test. But I think beyond all that, I think a
449 school has to have- has to be able to use all those tools to its own end, you know? I think there's
450 the student question, because at some point the student just does have to integrate into a larger
451 world, and for better or for worse, those are some of the many ways we have to evaluate if a
452 student is going to be able to thrive in a certain next step, but I think a school has to ask itself,
453 "how do I know I'm doing well?" Either the school or either the teacher.

454

455 JS: Can you talk a little bit more about the Classic Learning Test and what that is, and how that
456 would be a counter to the SAT or ACT?

457 BC: Yeah. The Classic Learning Test was developed not that long ago in part by a guy who was
458 an SAT tutor and a teacher, and he just started saying, “there has to be- for lots of reasons- there
459 has to be another way.” Also, the more he and the organization he founded (with some other
460 people) looked into it, the more they saw that, again, you have this real- really kind of amazing
461 machinery of testing that this directly connected to the common core, and it’s a little bit
462 overwhelming when you actually look at the money going into it, and the fact that the stated
463 goals have a lot to do with what you’d have to call social engineering and all of that sort of thing.
464 So I think what the Classic Learning Test does, and it’s still a pretty marginal option in terms of-
465 it’s not mainstream by any standard- but it just created a test that didn’t have to go through the
466 various committees that every SAT question gets put through, which has kind of turned every
467 question into the most bland question you can imagine. I think if I’m not- it starts to get funny in
468 terms of the things you can’t have on an SAT question, like the lexile reading level, it has to be
469 kind of common parlance. The question, it can’t offend anybody to the point where- I think, I
470 could be wrong, but I saw that (if I understood correctly) there couldn’t even be a reference to a
471 birthday, so there’s just all sorts of stuff that, rather than trusting the kids can really rise to the
472 occasion with difficult tests, or difficult problems, or thinking things that they may never have
473 seen before and go forward, it didn’t. And so the Classic Learning Test just said, “hey, well we’ll
474 trust these classic texts, and not trying to do the trick questions in math, or the ‘gotcha’ questions
475 in math, the thinking questions in math,” and just come up with its own test. And what was
476 interesting, I sort of happened into an association with the group, and I’ve always been so
477 impressed by all the people who are involved in it, but what was most interesting was it started
478 out as a test that was a floor profit venture, but with a lot of idealism behind it, is that it really
479 became a community very quickly, and it became a movement very quickly, and that was

480 fascinating to me because there's just this burgeoning, burgeoning movement of small- they tend
481 to be small because they're starting, but some are bigger, but a lot of schools that are classically
482 oriented (for whatever that word means) or traditionally oriented, and it was interesting to see a
483 lot of them start connecting with each other through a test. And homeschoolers, a lot of
484 homeschoolers, too.

485

486 JS: Kind of shifting gears a little bit, there has been this shift over the twentieth century and
487 moving into the twenty first century of adolescence and how we understand adolescence, and
488 education has been impacted by that greatly. So in your experience, in your opinion, how, if at
489 all, has the modern understanding of adolescence affected education and the methods that
490 teachers use to engage with their students?

491

492 BC: I think there's been a lot of great work done, especially when it comes to cognitive
493 psychology, and I'm really grateful for that- anything that I've been able to get my hands on or
494 that someone's put under my nose. I think teaching at a more- what would one say, traditional
495 school, or within a more traditional community, sometimes there's this desire for a teenager to be
496 another way, as if teenagers were just better in some golden era, and I think it's really helpful
497 when we do understand- you know, something like executive functioning getting a name to it.
498 We've all worked with students who've had trouble getting things in, right, but then when
499 someone has actually, really looked at executive functioning and said- and that may be a theory
500 that gets renamed and repackaged and better understood ten years from now, but right now that's
501 an example for me where I was really grateful where someone put it all together as a
502 constellation of attributes of a student that I could say, "yeah, I see that, and that student is the

503 ‘what can I do?’” And that’s the kind of thing I’ve been grateful for, with a lot of the work on
504 adolescent development. Also, whether we like it or not, kids are going to be adolescents for
505 longer, it’s just a fact of life, and that’s not anything that- you know, it would be crazy for me to
506 go into a classroom and be like, “well, what’s your problem kids, you should have all been
507 through a great war or something.” And I think some of that work has also been very helpful. I
508 think, again, it’s always very easy to find the extremes, which are silly. You can take student-
509 centered learning too far, you can take non-assessments too far, you can take project-based
510 learning too far. But I do think that there’s been a lot of work that’s been really good.

511

512 JS: You’re talking about the understanding of adolescents in- sorry, I’m just losing my train of
513 thought right now.

514

515 BC: Well I think I mentioned that the idea- I think we’ve understood that adolescence is
516 extending a little bit longer than we may have thought it was.

517

518 JS: Right, so has that informed, especially you were talking about the research in cognitive
519 development that you think has been very informative, do you think that has directly impacted
520 your education, or your teaching experience, how you implement those things in the classroom?

521

522 BC: Yeah, it’s given me a lot more empathy, it’s helped me learn from my students a lot more.
523 It’s helped me find what motivates them. I don’t say I’ve done this successfully every class, but
524 certain students, when they- their own choices and behaviors have helped me, have made me
525 think- either because of a success or a failure- they made me think, “okay, what’s going on

526 there?" and then when you realize what a lot of this may have to do with, okay, the frontal lobe is
527 still developing, or the way boys develop for the worse versus the way girls develop, or
528 something- you know, all of that sort of thing, it's really been helpful. I've voiced Daniel
529 Wellingham on anyone I can talk to, because I find his work quite helpful in cognitive
530 psychology and education.

531

532 JS: Kind of just as a bit of a closing question, this is of course a very wide, open-ended question,
533 can be very- as opinionated or not opinionated as you like, and you can answer it as shortly or as
534 long as you would like. But in your experience, what are the most important qualities for a
535 teacher to possess nowadays? Hello? Hello?

536

537 BC: Jack, can you hear me?

538

539 JS: Yeah. Mrs. Clark, are you there?

540

541 BC: Yeah.

542

543 JS: Oh, okay, sorry. I think it just cut out a little bit.

544

545 BC: Well I think they have to love their students, and see themselves not as gurus but as guides.

546 And they just have to love whatever it is they're teaching, and I think those two combinations, I

547 mean those three things, you know you can't go wrong with that. I mean I think the practical part

548 catches up.

549 JS: Right. Okay, well I want to really thank you for your time here, is there anything else you
550 might like to add that you think is important or beneficial to the conversation?

551

552 BC: I think this very act of what you're doing is also really something that we've lost, and I hope
553 we're doing more of it, which is learning and hearing other- especially from different times and
554 places- other, you know I just love the- I have learned so much from just talking to other
555 teachers, so I think this is really, really, really a great project in that sense.

556

557 JS: Oh, I agree, I think it's really cool. Just personally speaking, my professors who teach
558 education, they say that really, you'll never get through teaching unless you learn to adopt what
559 other people are doing and learn from other teachers.

560

561 BC: Yeah, yeah, it's great stuff. Well, good luck with what you're doing, and I hope that this
562 crazy semester turns out okay for you.

563

564 JS: Yes, I appreciate it. Alright, I'm going to stop recording now if that's alright.

565

566 BC: That sounds great.