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Interview with Blaine Young

Blaine Young

Kate Hitchcock

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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Researcher's Name: Kate Hitchcock

Event: Interview with Blaine Young, Former AC Director

Place: His home, Mt. Vernon, Ohio

Date: December 18, 1999

K: This is Kate Hitchcock interviewing Blaine Young on December 18, 1999. Just to start off with some basic biographical information of where you're from, your education, and how you got involved in the alternative center.

B: Well, I'm a retired administrator with 31 years of educational experienced. I grew up in the Ohio valley. I graduated from a parochial high school, went on and got my Bachelor's degree in social studies or history, concentration on Russian history at Whelan Jesuit University. And did my master work in secondary administration and guidance and counseling at the University of Akron. Taught four years in inner city parochial school in Akron. Came to Mount Vernon in 1972 as an associate principal with Mount Vernon City school district and was in that position for 21 years. In 1993 I was given the opportunity to develop and start the Knox County Alternative Center. And I did that from '93 to '99 when I retired.

K: OK. If you can describe for me the purpose of the alternative center as you saw it.

B: Well, the purpose – the original conception of the alternative center was to find an alternative education for kids that didn't fit into the mainstream academic program for the schools here in Mount _____, Mount Vernon, the four locals, and the Knox County career center. Kids that didn't want to be in school learned very quickly that if I am disruptive I'm going to be rewarded by getting what I want, getting kicked out of school. And so as administrator that dealt with disruptive kids, that was exactly what was happening. They were being rewarded for negative behavior. And the dumbest of kids, and not all disruptive kids are dumb by any stretch of the imagination, but even, you know, a special education kid, learns very quickly that if I don't want to be in school, if I make a big enough nuisance of myself, I'm gonna be kicked out. And so we were suspending kids to get them out of our hair or to get them off of teacher X's back for a week or two. We were kicking them out of school giving them the freedom to sleep in, to stay home and watch TV or invite their buddies or girlfriends over, which was contributing to a higher absenteeism rate, or they were going downtown vandalizing things, shoplifting. It was becoming really a community problem. And so the purpose was to provide an alternative structured academic program for kids that weren't responding and developing and growing in a traditional school environment. So that was basically the purpose.

K: What year did it start?

B: We began the planning in '92 and it started with open in August, you know, the end of August whatever the opening date of school was, in August of '93.

K: OK. And that was at the current facility?

B: Was at the current facility.

K: Was it originally a middle school?

B: No, it was originally an elementary school. And it had been closed down back in the early '70's. They consolidated. They used to have two middle schools. Pleasant Street was a middle school also. But they moved – they closed down Pleasant Street as a middle school and turned that into a large elementary school. And in so doing they closed three or four outdated elementary schools. And the alternative center downtown was closed as an elementary building. And a year or so later they did some minor remodeling and that became the central office, the board of education office, for Mount Vernon city schools until the mid '80's. And then they modified part of the high school. They took away the high school. And it was sitting there pretty much as a white elephant. A good prime location downtown. The board of education originally thought they were going to sell it to the county commissioners for the construction company jail. Then the bond issue went down and so it sat there until we took over in '93. So it sat empty for four or five years. And of course, you know, by that time then they're not constructing a new correctional facility, a new jail, for Knox County. And that's the new _____ which probably is more practical.

And so it was sitting there and we took over – we started with just two classrooms in the basement. The alternative center presently – they're all on that main floor. But when we started – and Glenn Marshall just moved in this past year – we had our two classrooms on the lower level and juvenile court had the top floor with their probation officers. And then there were two SPH units – well it started out as one on the main floor. And then they moved it up to two units. And now there are three, I believe, SPH units in the program. And then in '95 – we started out with seven through twelfth grade. And then in '95 we started a program for fourth, fifth and sixth graders as well. And that started in '95. So the alternative center presently deals with kids fourth through twelfth grade.

K: Alright. Now you were involved in the initial startings of the school?

B: That's right.

K: What guidelines were you held to? What kind of planerage did they give you, or did they just say here's the school, here's your idea.

B: Well, they basically – I had almost carte blanche freedom to develop the program because, again, when we started, we started with seventh through twelfth graders. And we had to plan an educational and component and a counseling component.

The first year we had just a skeletal crew that came in for – three different people came for a total of eight hours a week. And it was just a real mishmash. And not a lot was accomplished. Basically, the first year we just knew we were a place for kids to be assigned and while they were assigned there we put them into an academic program. The counseling was mediocre at best that very first year.

K: Because it wasn't consistent?

B: No. There was no consistency in three different people coming in for a total of eight hours a week. It just wasn't working. It was too fragmented to be effective.

K: Right. And then the following year Jim came in and _____?

B: Yeah. I believe he came. One year phase into another. He came in the next year on a part time basis and then gradually he expanded to be there almost full time.

K: Start to finish, how did you see – how did the alternative center evolve?

B: It changed daily, you know, we were really in the experimental mode. We would try different things. Some things worked, some things didn't work. And so it was really trial and error. And fortunately, you know, I was there as the director to do the administrative work, but I was also, you know, dealing with kids on a daily basis on an academic setting. And fortunately, the staff member that came aboard with me was excellent. There hasn't been much of a turnover. Lisa Thatcher started out with me and she's still in education working in the center _____. And then when she left, Kathy Muncie came aboard, and she did a fine job also. And she would still be there, but she was married to a minister and her husband – they moved out of state because he got a bigger church, you know, in a more affluent community. And so they moved on. Mrs. Freighter who does the intermediate came on as a substitute in our overflow room and that was good from two angles. It gave us an opportunity to see if she could handle that kind of kid because it takes a special person. And she had an opportunity to see if she wanted to work with that kind of kid. Because unfortunately there are a lot of people in education that really don't like kids. And it shows. But it worked out well that she was able to come in if she could work well with that type kid and she liked working with that type of kid. And she did. The whole time I was there we were blessed with a really good staff.

K: Now, the probation officers were there originally from the beginning?

B: Yeah. They moved in almost immediately because they were desperately in need of more office space that the courthouse couldn't provide. And that's been a key to the program – having those probation officers on-site. Because the kids that have a tendency to be disruptive know that there are immediate consequences for negative behavior. And they don't get thrown out of there. They may leave in handcuffs

which doesn't scare them. Because, I mean, these kids are pretty street-wise and pretty savvy. But it sure – if they had to go into detention for the weekend, it sure interferes with whatever social plans they had for Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

K: Right. Now, what year did Podville come in? And I guess that leads to what disciplines did you use before that?

B: I don't remember exactly when. Podville probably came in '95 Mrs. Springer came with the intermediate kids. I would say Podville came in in the end of – the very very end of '96 maybe. And it really started in '97 per se as Podville.

K: And then being used as a time out during the day?

B: Yeah, yeah. Before that, before that, any kids that was disruptive downstairs was sent upstairs and pretty much the probation officers had to sit there and babysit them as best they could. And it was not working. It wasn't effective. And that's when they finally decided – and it started in the spring of the year, I want to say, about the end of April, the first of May. So that would probably have been spring of '96. And then it started really in operation the very first day of '97. So in August of '97 we had an aid up there that was handling Podsville. So I think it was '97. I think those dates would be pretty accurate.

K: Now you started out with a similar classroom setup with the carrels. Is that always the way it was done?

B: What we started out in '93, we started with some beat up old carrels. We had like six carrels. We started with really nothing. We had some carrels from another school was gonna throw away so you know they weren't much good, school's getting rid of them. We had a three-legged table that we had to prop up against the chalk board so that it wouldn't fall over. Because we really didn't have anything when we started. And we gradually then just started getting the carrels. And that was my concept to try to keep kids that are easily distracted, put them in an environment where there were the fewest distraction possible. And then, you know, one of our brainstorms two years ago, we decided to separate them by sexes and that was a real positive thing as well. We hadn't done that before, it was pretty much my call. When I had the intake conference with the kid and the parent, I would decide, you know, whoever had room and would that kid work better with me or would that kid work better with Mrs. Muncie or with Mrs. Thatcher when she was there. With Mrs. Springer it was all based on age and grades, unless there were some kids that were just age inappropriate. Then we would move them into another area. But we started that, I think, two years ago that we separated them by sexes. And that seemed to work out fairly well.

K: Now when another school takes on more students as the year goes on, just by nature, what happens in the overflow room. Is it co-ed in the overflow room and in the flood room. How does that work?

B: Well, it was. But then when we went with – usually there are more males in the program than females. And so most of the time after we segregate – it used to be co-ed in the overflow as it was in all of the classrooms, but when we started with Mrs. Muncie taking the girls, I took the boys, and then basically it worked out that there were all boys in the overflow room. There might be – I would have all the high school long-term kids, boys. Mrs. Muncie would have a combination, she'd have all the females. And then the overflow room would be seventh graders through twelfth graders, some long-term if we had more than I could handle, the 20 that I could handle. And so they would have all the – he would pretty much have the short-term unless I would have a vacancy and a kid was coming in for a week and I'd just put him in there with me. And that seemed to work out well.

K: OK. In terms of – in comparison to their home school, what do you see that these students are missing by coming to the alternative center?

B: Well, social interaction. Because basically – and I don't know how it's being run now, but the only social interaction they had was on the school bus coming to school. And the interaction that they had with the other kids until 8:30. And then there was no – they didn't even have social interaction during lunch. The only other social interaction was when they were going down to art or they were going down for physical education or when they were in a group. They – most of the kids that were at the alternative center really weren't kids that would get involved in school activities. Now the school had no problem with them coming back and there were some, a couple kids, that would go back to the home school for football or for baseball or for some sport. But most of the kids who were there weren't involved in school activities. It was pretty difficult for them to participate in school activities and social interaction.

K: Right. In terms of education-wise, do you feel that they – if they're on a long-term curriculum at the alternative center, do you think that they're getting the same out of it?

B: They're not getting the same as kids in the home school because we don't have laboratory courses. It's – their work is pretty much all self-directed. There's no actual classroom teaching going on. But the kids that were there have proven that they were not successful in the academic program. So if they stayed at the home school they would earn probably no credits, while at the alternative center they could earn – some of them earned as many as seven credits in a given year. But we didn't have a program to meet the needs of all kids. We offered no foreign language. We were there basically for, you know, just the basic courses to get them back on track. But our intent was to have them there mostly for their freshman and

sophomore year so that they could go back and get, you know, hopefully, modify their behavior, get back on track academically, go back to the home school for the socialization and the courses that we were unable to – because basically we were a two-room high school trying to get the kids some basic courses to get them back on track.

K: Were you involved with the process that it took to get this school past the whole idea and concept or did they hire you after they had come up with this concept?

B: No, I was involved in the planning stages as well.

K: OK.

B: Even though I was working at the high school, we had our superintendent wanted all administrators to have job goals. And get involved in some projects. And my project was to work on the alternative center.

K: So you were involved in the retreat, I guess, of ...

B: I wasn't involved in the initial retreat. But then after that, that's when the concept developed with the retreat. I was not part of that. But then after they started the community study I was involved in that. And we went and looked at different programs that were in operation. And there weren't too many. And the ones that were in operation were not too good.

K: The community programs – do you mean ...

B: In other communities. In other communities we visited some other – we went to _____ and to Mansfield. But they were different. They had a different format and they were also in some cases dealing with a different clientele than we were. So that's why we pretty much saw what Knox County, Mount Vernon and Knox County's needs were. And we said this is what we want to do.

K: So this was one of the initial alternative centers in the state of Ohio.

B: Yeah, yeah. One of the early ones.

K: Did you model yours, was it modeled after other ones that you saw?

B: Wait, wait, wait. We would pick and choose different elements, but we pretty much knew this is what we need for the community, for the kids in the community. This is what's needed from the agencies that were involved. The kids probably wouldn't have agreed with that at all. But that's pretty much what the – this is what the kids need, this is what the community wants. It's what these agencies want. Now you plan a program. And that basically what I did.

K: And just build from the ground ...

B: And as I said, a lot of them were trial and error. This works, this doesn't work. So we would drop that. We need to restructure this and we need to get this component strengthened. We need to do that. I suppose it's an ongoing thing. You know I know Glenn Marshall has made some changes. And there'll probably be more changes as long as the program is in operation.

K: In terms of the interaction between the teachers and the probation officers and the counselors, and I guess a little bit of what the court – when you were there how did that whole structure and dynamic work?

B: Well, it was very informal. You know, we didn't really have group meetings per se. When a problem develops, we would just, you know, I would take Jim Messineas aside, say Jim we need to do this, we need to look at this, you need to explore this. I'm really concerned with this individual. You need to really see if there's some real turmoil going on in this kid's life. And the same thing with probation. We pretty much, you know, we work with all the probation officers, but Carol (name) was pretty much the liaison for juvenile court. And so – and I didn't know Carol previous to the conception. She had worked with me at the high school in a program that we had which was called guidance center. And it was a classroom that had some of the features of the alternative center but by no means the same. And so I had a good working relationship with Carol, and still do. I mean we still go to lunch occasionally. We talk on the telephone and things like that. So it was very informal and when there was a problem, if they needed to see me about something, they were down at my door. Or I would be upstairs with them on an informal basis. Now we did meet maybe semester-wise a couple times – there would be some meetings, but nothing routinely. When we would evaluate the kids say at semester we thought we were ready to go back to the home school that had been with us the first semester, then we would sit down with the therapy component who was usually Jim Bisinius, with Carol, or with any other probation officers and the teaching staff there.

K: What kind of things would you look for in returning a student back to their school? What showed you that they were ready?

B: Well, they really – I guess we go from the standpoint that we felt in conjunction without ever performing there how they were staying on task academically, how the therapist felt they could survive, and basically whether the kid wanted out of the alternative center and really wanted to go back. We had some kids that didn't want to go back even – because they felt more comfortable at the alternative center. And if we sent them back, we could almost guarantee that they would be back on our doorstep because, again, if they didn't want to be in the environment of the home school, for whatever reason, they would do something. They would go in and

threaten the administrator or cuss the administrator out, the administrator would immediately sign the kid back to us.

K: Now schools can send a student on suspension without sending them to the alternative center?

B: Well, they do, but originally the concept was – basically in a perfect world, no kid was to be suspended out of school. If you were a building administrator and you had your own in-school suspension program, fine, that was wonderful. Keep the kid right there. But if you didn't, then for five days you would send the kid to the alternative center. Or for ten days if it were a ten day suspension or long-term that's more than ten days. But some of the schools while I was there, and I can only speak for when I was there, there were certain schools that I know were suspending kids because they didn't want to pay the per diem tuition to send the kid there. But if they didn't want to spend the money, or they didn't have the money. But that technically, there should have been no student in Knox County suspended out of school. But that was not the case.

K: It's my understanding the students – the money that came out of the school's pocket was the same that the state gave per student per day. Is that what it was?

B: It was actually less. They were paying less. They were making money even if we suspended, they sent the kid to us a full year.

K: I don't understand how a school could say we don't have enough money to send our student there.

B: Well, I guess it's, you know, it's apples and oranges. They were getting the state money. And that was to put 22 kids, to pay for 22 kids to be in a classroom. They were getting that same amount of money, but if three of those kids were sent to the alternative center, they were – some of that money that was coming in for that classroom per se was being channeled to us. So it was, actually it was costing them some money because they didn't get to keep it all. So any time they didn't get to keep it all, even if it were just \$20 a day, \$100 a week that was coming to us, that was coming out of their general fund.

K: OK. That makes sense. So the _____ would be less likely to send students there.

B: Unless that student was just totally obnoxious and it was worth any amount they had to pay to get that kid out of there.

K: Did you find that certain school systems did type of a housecleaning system and any bad kids that they didn't want to deal with kind of got funneled to your school?

B: Yeah. You have to be real careful that you didn't become a dumping ground. And there were times when I really didn't think that – especially when you got into some type of your special ed kids. I don't mean SPH, but your LD and your DH kids. There would be a time that I really didn't think that it was a – that we were the appropriate place for this kid. And generally, you know, and again, I was trying to play the diplomat. And I would say well we'll take the kid for ten days. And then we'll re-assess the situation. What is your plan if he or she isn't successful at the alternative center? I want to know what the plan is because if I determine that it's not appropriate, I'm sending him or her back to you. I want to know what you plan is going to be. Because after ten days – well keep him there until we get a plan worked out. Well that can drag on for months. You know, it's part of the political tennis game that we play with the kid being the tennis ball being bounced back and forth.

K: Right. So you would find a (inaudible) ... What would you do to try to serve their needs?

B: Well, basically would probably be the counseling component was a big factor in trying to adapt a curriculum to meet their individual needs. And that was not easy because, you know, we were not teaching these kids per se. We were there as a resource person. The staff was a resource person because you might have 20 kids in your class and they were in 20 different places in the math book and they were doing 20 different things. So it's impossible to teach class. Because even if you broke them up into smaller units, while you were working with these four kids, the other sixteen were doing all sorts of things. You really had to be there as a babysitter. And try to get them motivated for some academic goals.

K: In terms of actual students, do you see similarities in background, home status, or be whatever it is, common characteristics in the students that come to this school?

B: Well, the vast majority were using and abusing substances. There was a lot of chemical abuse on their part. Probably four out of five has been subjected to physical or sexual abuse. But some kids were very bright. Some kids were not as bright. Some kids had strong family support, but most of them didn't. Most of the families were in crisis. That's why – the parent was trying to deal – a lot of single parents, a lot of grand – a single grandparent trying to raise a kid because their kid wasn't able to raise their kids. So grandma was trying to do it or grandpa. A lot of dysfunctional families. And a lot of financial problems within the home.

K: How did you get access to this information, I mean, in terms of their drug use. I guess they're tested when they're assessed by Mary Samuel.

B: Well, that was part of it, but a lot of that came to me through Jim Bisinius. You know, without divulging any confidentiality, a general statement, you know, he said that eight out of ten or nine out of ten were using or abusing substances. And that

came out, again, without him divulging confidentiality. This came out in the group sessions that he had or individual sessions. And of course having been in Mount Vernon as long as I had been working with kids in Mount Vernon, I knew so many of these kids parents. So, you know, once you're in the community, there are just certain families that a flare goes off when you hear the name.

K: Did you find that students look the same – within the same, brothers and siblings just kept coming to this school?

B: And cousins. And you know, I knew the ...
(end of side A)

(side B)

B: ... the parents that made these kids and the way they were when they were in high school, you know you're dumbfounded. There's something there because I'm surprised that the kid turned out as well as he or she did. When you think of the genetics and the environment that the kid came from.

K: Do you see – what do you see as the prime factor behind these students misconduct? Do you think that it leads directly back to the family?

B: For the most part, but certainly not, you know, it's not a total thing. But some of these kids, they were the only one in the family to be disruptive. It's a whole combination. Self-esteem, chemical imbalance, trashy mouth because of sexual abuse. Maybe there's only one – this was the only kid in the family that had been abused sexually. Or was just the last of many. Everyone in the family had been abused. Either physically or sexually. I guess it varies from individual to individual, but self-esteem, abuse, deprivation financially in the family – it gets all different _____. I'm just amazed that, you know, that we didn't have more violence in that academic setting. But again, the kids knew if there was a problem – I never felt the least bit threatened. I was threatened, but I never felt that this kid would carry through, you know, on that. But, you know, a kid could have brought a knife or gun any time. It could happen any time.

K: Right. Well weren't they searched? Or was that something that would come later?

B: Well, yeah. They were searched, but, you know, that wasn't unless we had – they would do a routine search. But then there might not be another search for six or eight weeks. Or unless we felt that we – or we got wind that something was brewing, then they would do a search.

K: In terms of – I know there are certain rules about how to dress so that you can't conceal things, I mean, did that develop over time?

B: Yeah, yeah. We did – the handbooks developed – again, I did handbooks and we would make changes year to year as we did it.

K: Right. So it's definitely just an evolving process in terms of what was needed. In terms of the discipline used at this school, how often was the family brought in or talked to about things that were going on in the school? Was it usually just the intake process?

B: The intake process and those that were on probation – there was a greater involvement from – and that was about 60% of the student population was on probation. So their probation officers involved the kid. Unless there was something of major concern. Because we really – it was very difficult for the staff.

We all had telephones in our classroom, but it was very different. I couldn't call up your mom and talk about you with 20 kids in that classroom. You know, you had to do that before school or after school. And before school basically we were tied up with intake. So you didn't have, you know, what's it like – we had a conference period from 11:30 to 12:15 because we were responsible for those kids. We had aids, but the aids weren't there all the time. They were also taking the kids down for physical education or going to the career center for a welding class. So you didn't have the freedom. Now Jim Messineas – he had the flexibility as the therapist. And I don't know who's the therapist this year, Jim's ...

K: Derrick Fischer is one of the newly hired ones. Cynthia Garhart has been there for the past couple years, but not as regular of a basis. But Derrick is the new one that has replaced Jim.

B: OK. So Derrick is the new ...

K: He's running groups.

B: Are they going down on a regular basis?

K: He's hired by the course now, I believe, rather than sent over by MEL builders.

B: Oh, OK.

K: He's separate from MEL builders.

B: Derrick Fischer. OK.

K: Very similar and the same in mentality, Jim has come back to work with Derrick with the kids occasionally just to help him get in with them.

B: But Jim was getting burned out.

K: He switched over to, where is it, Newark? The Newark office, to try to help with programs there in terms of their MEL builders type counseling center. I guess it might be the mentoring program starting it there. I'm not exactly sure, but he's moved. He's moved on a little bit.

B: Yeah. I met Derrick, but I don't remember him too well.

K: He has the same demeanor with the kids, which is nice.

B: Yeah. Oh, sure.

K: How effective do you see the alternative center as being in terms of recurrence? I know there's something like a 20% recurrence or students that return.

B: Yeah. You have that _____. It varied from year to year. I think it depended on the individual. Some kids really did not want to come back to the alternative center. And that was true for the younger kids. But the older kid was more inclined to come and stay for various reasons. But the older the kid, I think, decreased the anger or the fear that they had of coming back. I don't think it was much of a deterrent with older kids. Younger kids, yeah, I think it had some bearing. And with some older kids. But by that time they were so angry, they were so confused, they were so turned-off by the traditional program that hey this was a pretty pleasant cop-out to come to the alternative center, and I'll just be content to stay right there. And I think you have to guard against that because that was not the purpose. It was not a long-term thing other than, you know, OK get your act together and get back acclimated this academic year so that we can send you back to the home school. Because that's where you really need to – that's the real world. The alternative center is not the real world. They need to go back into a traditional academic setting, get a high school diploma. And I think we were very successful in getting the kids to earn some credits while they were at the alternative center. Yet some of these kids had been in the freshman year, this was their third year, and they hadn't earned zilch. They had earned no credits. And we were able to get those kids – I think we were very successful in getting – they were there and they would get so bloomin' bored that they would do anything so – they would do something and if they cooperated and did their best, they were guaranteed of getting some credits.

K: So it was a little easier for them to get their credits do you think by working on their own?

B: Yeah.

K: Do you think that it was because it was a lower – there's a lower academic standard? Or what do you think the reason behind that was?

B: They felt more confident because they weren't being called on in class. They weren't being made to answer a question if they didn't know the answer. They were working at their own pace, and if they weren't good in math, the only one that knew that was the kid and the teacher because they weren't being called upon. And they didn't feel threatened, especially if they didn't have good self-esteem as far as it came to academics. So I think that was a plus at the alternative center. As far as lower academics, yeah, we were not gearing kids to go to the ivy league schools. That wasn't the intent. Our intent was to help them get enough self confidence and make it possible for them to earn credits that they weren't earning in the traditional academic program at their home school. So if they could really get back on track

and get some – hey, I earned four credits. So it is possible for me to go back to the home school and get back on task.

K: Has that reconstituted a success for you in terms of these students?

B: Yeah. Or the kid didn't – the more successful was the kid that didn't want to come for whatever reason – that didn't like it. But unfortunately, we provided a very safe and a very structured environment and some kids want that and need that.

K: So over the years how did you deal with that, with those that wanted to stay? You appealed to the home school? Or did you try to send them back there?

B: Well we would send them back. Whether they stayed or not was totally up to them. But that's where the counseling component came in that you need to get back on task. And _____ work with kids to reinforce their self-esteem, their confidence, that hey yeah I can succeed back in the home school. You know, it's not a perfect world that we live in and the kid that didn't want to be in the home school – you know, and I'd have kids show up the first day. The first day of school they were back. They wanted to come back to the alternative center. And I'd say what are you doing here? Well, I just wanted to come here, my mother wants me to be here. Well you go on back to the home school and get settled in. But if they didn't want to be at the home school, they did something. They'd threaten somebody and they'd get sent back to us. Because if they'd been their previously, you know, they were marked individual. And the home school administrator wasn't gonna take a lot of nonsense. Having been there, I understand where that guy's coming from. Because, you know, as a building administrator, you spend 90% of your time with 5% of the kids as far as discipline goes. The good kids, you know, they get an education in spite of the staff, in spite of the administrator. They just plug along and they do what's expected and they play the game. And they know what to do with English to get that English credit and to keep that English teacher off their back and what have you. But it's the kid that is a rebel and doesn't want to conform or doesn't know how to conform to the standards of academics. I keep telling you, you don't have to have a keg in college, anyplace, graduate school.

would do something to come back

K: Right. In terms of – you mentioned a kid or a student being marked. Do you have any perception of how their treated maybe by either their teacher or their peers when they return from the alternative center? Whether they're watched more carefully, whether they're ostracized by their peers?

B: Well, it depends. Their peers, in a typical middle school and typical high school you have, you know, your peers are everyone in your class or in the student body. But that student body is broken up between the clicks, you know, here in Mount Vernon you have the preppies, you have the hoods, you have the bizarre individuals that are always black with black nail polish. You have a whole assortment and you go with the group where you feel accepted and where you feel the most

comfortable. So it depends on, you know, they can go back and be – any kid can go back and be accepted unless they're just off the wall. They can go back and they can be accepted by some small segment within the group called their peers. As far as whether they're watched more closely, I guess that depends on the teacher that, you know, if you're on her list, it depends on hey man you just looked cross-eyed and she's gonna be on your case. You know, if she's busy doing what she's hired to do, she probably is not gonna give you a second look. That depends on the individual. I can't make a generalization.

K: But as an administrator, you are not as likely to tolerate things from students?

B: Yeah, yeah.

K: Once they've cross that line you just know ...

B: I was administrator before we had the alternative center. I literally had a segment of kids that after spring break they had lost credit, they weren't gonna get any credit, and I pretty much called their parents and said why don't you keep Johnny at home. He's lost all credit for the year. He's here, he's nothing but a disruption. He has no motivation to behave because he's not gonna get any _____. I would start sending kids home after spring break. And I don't think I'm any different than any of the other administrators. If I did it when I was in that position, I'm sure other administrators are doing it. And some of them are still doing it and not sending them to the alternative center because it's costing them X amount of dollars.

K: But if you had had the alternative center when you were an administrator you would have utilized it?

B: Oh, I'm sure I would. I would have loved to have had something like that, but you know, we didn't have it until I left and took _____. And I could understand – and really it's been well used. It's been well used when you look at the numbers of kids, you know, and in six years I think there were over 1200 kids that were in the program. That's pretty significant.

K: Right. From what I observed, I see the alternative center as an effort to I guess balance the education, try to give them some credit, and the discipline aspect that is that they are suspended or expelled or whatever. What do you see that – do you see that either one of those overrides in terms of one takes over as more prevalent in that school, or focused on in the school? Or do you see that it is balanced (inaudible) ...

B: Probably when I was there I perceived that – I was more heavy on discipline than academics. Because, of course, in my environment, I spent 12 years in a parochial school. And of course discipline was, you know, there were nuns and there were

religious and I certainly don't agree with all that and I no longer see the need for a parochial type of education. But I think you have to have an environment where kids can learn. And I think you have to have discipline. Ideally it's self-discipline, you know, you have to be self-disciplined to get up and go to class, do the papers, do the readings that you have to do. If you're not self-disciplined, you're not going to succeed at Kean College. Plus there's also a think that you're paying \$28,000 a year or someone is. And that can be a real motivational thing. But for kids that don't have anything, that had never been successful in the academic world, they have to learn some discipline. Many of them don't have self-discipline. So it has to be imposed upon them. You have to be made to be uncomfortable enough so that you learn some self-discipline. And then you won't have to be uncomfortable. As long as you meet the expectations of society.

So I was more – when the kid came there, you know, I'm talking about the long-term kid now. I'm not talking about the short-term kid. The short-term kid, we were just a holding thing for five or ten days. But the thing that I wanted to see done, and that was the attitude that I took in the classroom. And with the attitude that I wanted the counselors and the probation officers to impose upon the kids that you are going, you know, you can either be disciplined or you can discipline yourself. There's gonna be some discipline. Because I think you have to have that component before the kid can blossom and develop some academics. So you have to have – in my thinking, and the next person may totally disagree with me. But that was my thing. That you have to have discipline in order to begin the academic.

K: In terms of the recent changes or the new director _____, have you heard of any changes or seen – I don't know if you've been back to the school, if you have any ...

B: I have not been back for a couple reasons. I have not been back. I know Glenn. Glenn was a teacher when I was administrator at _____ high school, so I evaluated Glenn Marshall as the administrator. And Glenn and I have maintained a very cordial relationship. I mean, when he was in administration at the high school and I was at the alternative center, we would regularly meet and have breakfast together, you know, and talk about different things. Glenn's, I think, mode of operation is different than mine. He immediately put all of the alternative center classrooms on the same floor. I don't know whether that's good or bad. I wouldn't have done it if I had been there. I would have kept it the way it was.

K: Now how is it divided?

B: Now he has – there were two SPH classes on the main floor. And there was Mrs. Springer's classroom and the overflow room. Those were the four classrooms. And the high school component was down in the basement. So he wanted all of the alternative center on the main floor. And that was fine. I just – I wanted to keep them separated. And so – I haven't been back. They've invited me back. In fact I saw Glenn at a brunch last Saturday a week ago. He and his wife and we were at a

Christmas brunch and we chatted for a while. I don't know how the program's doing. I hear some things, but I don't want to – I ran things, I think I ran things well. I had a good rapport with my staff. Any time anyone comes in and makes changes, well B didn't do this, you know. So in fairness to Glenn, you know, he may be much better at running the program than I ever was. I don't know. And I'm not getting a lot of feedback from staff because the only person that I had regular contact with is Carol (name). And I don't know anything about the new person that took Kathy Muncie's place.

K: Mr. Vanderpul.

B: Is that Mr. Vanderpul? I don't know anything about him. I wouldn't know him if I walked into him. So you know, I don't know.

K: In terms of things unfinished or other ideas you had for re-structuring your – changing or adding to the alternative center, what kind of things would you have done or would you suggest to do?

B: Well, I'm not a big person on change. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. I was very pleased with the way the program was going. There were some segments, some agencies, that wanted to keep changing and keep improving. And I don't see anything wrong with improvement, not at all. But some of it, you know, I may not feel is for the best. And being there in the trenches, I think I had the best opinion of what was going on. Now my opinion is my opinion. And some other people may disagree. But just to make changes to make changes, I've never been one to do that.

And I was, you know, I retired from the alternative center before some political things that were going on. Mount Vernon was subsidizing my salary to make it attractive for me take over the position and that subsidy is going to – is only for five years. I was working – the program was very successful. We had won state awards. My evaluations were impeccable. Then all of a sudden I was gonna take a cut in pay. And I just – I wasn't willing to do that working harder and dealing with more people for less money. To me psychologically that wasn't wholesome for me to even consider doing that. So that was the primary reason why I decided – I could make more money being retired than working. And I think that was silly. But I intend, as I said, I'm going to look for something else. I'm gonna do something else just because my wife is still working and it's silly for me to be home and be a house husband while she's working.

And you know, I did it for seven years, six years, yeah, six years. I proved that I could do it. I'm successful at it. It's time for me to go on to a new dimension. And I have some things that I think I want to do. And the biggest headache I've found is you start out with a skeleton staff at the beginning of the year because you have so few kids. We would start the first day of school with more staff than students. But then when you get up to 85 kids, you have to keep adding staff and it's hard to get good people that can work with this type of kid to come in and

work for the salaries and no benefits that they were willing to pay. That was the biggest headache that I saw. And until they get over that, I don't think the program is going to get any more successful than it has.

K: In terms of – you _____ awards. I just want to ask what were those awards?

B: Well, let's see. We won Ohio's Best the first year that it was in operation.

K: '93-'94?

B: No, no. The first year the Ohio's Best awards were given. I think that was in '95 we got that, '95 or '96. I have it on my resume. And then we were nominated for the Sea of Change Award for the next year. We didn't win, but we were nominated. And that was a real honor and distinction. And then we also were awarded a Reclaim Ohio through the juvenile court system because of the alternative center in Podville there was an award won there. And I think there was '95, '96 and '97 (inaudible). And I've kept track just for my own personal satisfaction the groups where we went out and gave presentations and groups that came in from around the state. And we had over 125 groups mostly from Ohio, but some from out of state that came in to look at our program to get ideas to take back to their home districts. And, you know, no one told me to do that. But, you know, if I got a phone call and a group was coming from Newark or Mansfield, I would just record that, you know. I don't have the exact date, I have in October we had visitors from this one or that one. And I think that said something for the program.

K: Have you visited other alternative centers since the start of the program?

B: After I started the program I did some consulting. And I help get some programs – and I kept in touch. But actually I thought it was very difficult for me to be out looking at other alternative programs that were pretty much modeled after us. I just didn't want to take the time away from – because I (inaudible) ... to know what was going on, I had to be there on a daily basis. And so we visited some when we started out and I was in contact with people asking – if I wanted to know what someone else was doing, I'd call them. But they were pretty much calling me because they were mimicking or modeling themselves after our program.

K: What was your personal goal in regards to the program, I guess, when you started it or whether you changed (inaudible)

B: Well, I guess it was to provide the best opportunity for the kids who were at risk. To get them in there, get them settled into the routine, get some discipline, hopefully self-discipline, and to have them earn some credits. And that was pretty much – that was my personal goal. It's, you know, to have a program that the community could be pleased with. And I'm just very grateful for the staff that I

had. I only had one – we had to ask one individual not to come back. There were some others that were, you know, from year to year, they just didn't handle themselves, they weren't able to deal with that type of kid. And that's not a put down of anyone because it takes a real special person to deal with the type of kid, you know, it's real easy to teach the highly motivated gifted kid. They're not difficult at all, but it's the kid that is not motivated and is not disciplined and is not academically challenged. That takes a real teacher to do that or a real staff person to work with them.

And so we had one individual that was good with kids, but you couldn't expect her to keep confidentiality. She might be telling her church social group well do you know what this kid did, who was that kid, you know. And you could still give out information like that. What goes on at school should stay there. And after I come home I don't want to tell my wife, you know, because she grew up in this community so she knows – I came here in '72. She left for a number of years and then came back. But, you know, I can come home and say well guess who was in the alternative center today and what they did. I want to leave that nonsense. I put in my work day. I want to come home and my wife is really not interested. I know a lot of times my mother-in-law would stay well I understand that so and so was at your school. And, you know, it'd be the grandchild of a friend of hers, you know, and I'd say how did you find out. Well his grandmother told me. I'd say did she tell you why he was there? Yeah, she did. You know. Don't bug me with it. I've got a life outside of that, you know. I work, you know, to provide some extras that I want so that I can live a little more comfortably. I don't – that's not my whole life. It's a job. And it's not my life.

K: (inaudible)

B: Well, small town. You're from back east, you're maybe from a bigger community. But this is _____ and everyone knows everyone else's business. And if they don't know your business, they make up stuff about your business. You know how it is.

K: It gets around real fast.

B: And if it isn't juicy enough, there's always someone down the hall that'll, you know, embellish it.

K: (inaudible)

B: Absolutely.

K: Well, thank you so much for ...
(end of tape)