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Interview with Dr. Nadine Barnes - Alumna; Director of the Baudhuin Oral School

Nadine Barnes
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JP: This is Julian Pleasants. I’m with Dr. Nadine Barnes. It is the 27th of October 2011, at Nova Southeastern University. Talk a little bit about your relationship with Nova University. When did you first hear about it? What was your first interaction with the university?

NB: Okay. My first interaction was 20 years ago. I was a stay-at-home mom. My children were in high school and I was looking for a place to go back to my career, which was in education, and I met a person who was at that time a preschool teacher at the Baudhuin Oral School, which is now the University Middle School. And at time they were working with children with autism and children with learning disabilities. Also, half of that building belonged to the speech and language program, so it was very
interactive that way. So she said, “Why don’t you come in and volunteer?” And I thought that was a great idea.

JP: So you were living in this area, Plantation?

NB: I lived in Cooper City, Florida, not far from here, and she suggested that I come in and do some volunteer work. I got a little addicted and hooked [laughs]. I enjoyed working with the children so very much that I decided that perhaps I’d go back to teaching again. What happened as I proceeded to go through the process with the department of education was I realized I was missing a great deal of credits.

JP: You did your undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh?

NB: Pittsburgh, with a degree in English Literature. So I didn’t realize that I’d enjoy being with children that had special needs or even elementary school children, but I enjoyed it so much that I said, “Well, if I get a job at Nova, they pay your tuition free!” I had a whole list of courses I had to take that the state had sent me. “This would be as great opportunity.”

So the following year, 19 years ago in October, Sue Talpins — I don't know if you’ve had the opportunity to
interview Dr. Susan Talpins, but she was at that time the
director of the Baudhuin Oral School and she hired me in as
a teacher’s aide. And at that time—

JP: Let me interrupt you. I'm sorry. I was just
talking to John and he did make this clear. The old oral
school, as it previously existed, is now part of the family
center?

NB: The old oral school, yes, as it previously
existed moved over into the family center, and I believe
they have a very strong autism program there and have
contracted with Broward County.

JP: Okay, so it’s still dealing with autistic
children?

NB: Mm-hm.

JP: Is that part of your purview as well?

NB: No, not only longer.

JP: No longer, okay.

NB: Well, when I started at the Baudhuin Oral School,
the focus wasn’t on autism. The focus was mostly on
hearing and children with speech and language difficulties.
Autism, there were just a lot of children who started to
come in who had speech and language difficulties and that’s very related to autism, so it kind of overlapped each other. And then we had a great deal of interventions with new programming on how to manage children with autism. The program grew more towards working with autistic children.

It was at that time actually, after I had worked as an aide and completed all those classes for undergraduate certification in education with the state — well, I had an undergraduate degree, but to get certification they send you a letter of eligibility, and on that list they have an entire amount of courses you have to take. When I completed that, they did hire me in as a teacher, and I worked there as a teacher at the Baudhuin Oral School and taught.

JP: And what year was this when you started?

NB: Oh, boy, you’re asking me hard questions, Dr. Pleasant. [laughter] Let’s see. That was way back. I started in 1996 – ’92 to ’96, right, I worked there as a teacher.

JP: Now, at the same time, you were doing your certification courses first?
NB: I had completed that, but I was so interested I began a Master’s in Specific Learning Disabilities.

JP: And when you get a Master’s in Specific Learning Disabilities, what does that include? Partly, I'm sure, autism.

NB: It does, but at that time there wasn’t as much focus on autism as there is now, so the majority of the classes that I took dealt with children who had specific learning disabilities, how to read psychological, how to identify what their specific problems were, how to create students.

JP: So dyslexic kids?

NB: Right, dyslexia.

JP: This was probably pre-ADD, wasn’t it?

NB: Everyone had ADD. [laughter] ADHD, ADHD! Everybody had that. What we were looking for were specific difficulties in learning so that if you have a processing problem or dyslexia or a specific reading problem or some children have working memory problems. Those kinds of things were considered learning disabilities.
I was very interested in that. I finished that program and completed several years at the Baudhuin Oral School as a teacher.

JP: Well, let me go back a little bit. When you were taking your courses for the MS, you were going at night, weekends – how did that work?

NB: Just like that, nights and weekends.

JP: And so you would finish your regular workday and go to class?

NB: And sometimes go to class.

JP: And so you would take one course at a time until you finished? How did it work?

NB: One or two, depending on the nature of the course. If it was a difficult course, then I would take one, because if it required more research, it would be more time.

JP: Did you take all of them on campus?

NB: Yes. They did not have any online teaching at that time. I took everything here in buildings – the Parker Building, which was our library at that time. Of course, we didn’t have the technology that they have now,
but that was the library I used. And I took them and sometimes they’d have them in the Sonken Building. They’d have a class in the Sonken Building.

JP: Because that was, at one point, the University School, right?

NB: Yeah, that was their high school and middle school as well. Let’s see. What other places did I take classes? Buildings that were not new is where we took classes, right.

JP: It must’ve been somewhat interesting in a way because you’re studying at nights and weekends what you’re dealing with on a daily basis.

NB: It was very interesting and so applicable, really. It was great.

JP: So in both cases it enhanced your study because you were dealing with it on a practical basis.

NB: Absolutely.

JP: And it enhanced your practical work because you were dealing with these theoretical concepts?
NB: Nova set it up where it worked so beautifully that way, because I was able to do a great deal of my research right in my classroom.

JP: Yeah.

NB: And it was really a wonderful experience. I just loved it. Yeah, it was great.

JP: Now, as an employee, did you get a discount on the graduate courses? Were they free?

NB: They were free at that time.

JP: Free? That’s a pretty good deal.

NB: That was a pretty good deal. But, of course, the pay for being a teacher wasn’t that great, so it kind of balanced out. [laughter]

JP: And unfortunately it still —

NB: It still isn’t, I know.

JP: Those of us in the profession are not in it for the money, I can tell you that.

NB: That’s for sure.

JP: But we would like to get decent pay anyway.
NB: Something worthy of what we do.

JP: Okay, now you worked with the Oral School for four years.

NB: Mm-hm.

JP: And one of the things that you mentioned in here, you were an intern/teacher/mentor.

NB: Yes.

JP: What did that entail?

NB: If there was a teacher who was studying to be a teacher in an undergraduate program or even in a master’s program, I would take them in and I would be their mentor and also their teacher that — I forgot what they used to call them. I’d be like the classroom teacher, where they would work in my room in order to —


NB: Right.

JP: And I understand very little about this, but obviously when you have speech problems you have I guess a societal element, neurological, psychological. It can be a
combination of these things. So how did you go about helping a kid, say, who was dyslexic?

NB: Well, you really need to be more specific. Dyslexia is very broad and you have to look very carefully at a psychological that breaks down which part of the dyslexia the child has a problem with. And then you create the strategy that particularly focuses on that particular problem.

JP: Is it mainly psychological?

NB: No. A lot of it is. I think it’s more neurological than it is psychological. Psychological, I think, would deal more with behaviors that could be a result of the child not being successful.

JP: Because they got frustrated?

NB: Right. A lot of them have problems with phonetic sounds. A lot of them are not able to put the letters together. It isn’t always just about reversals, but it is also about tracking and not seeing words and letters the way they should be. There are all different types of specifics.

JP: But how do you reorder their brain?
NB: Well, you don’t. You know, that’s an interesting term that you used, “reorder their brain.” What you do basically is that you teach them strategies and they internalize the strategies and they become automatic to them. So I don’t believe I rewire their brain. I might rewire their approach to learning. And then they have these particular strategies that they use, like something as simple as perhaps a person who’s forgetful — and this is just a simple example — we might teach them to use Post-Its in certain places, and that’s a strategy they just might be able to take on. If they’re visual and it helps them remember, it’s a simple strategy. In dyslexia, it’s not as simple as that, but I’m just saying that’s the type of thing. Then they internalize it and then they’re able to apply it to their learning.

JP: I think what you’re doing with autistic children is much more difficult.

NB: It’s very different.

JP: Of course, there are different levels of that as well.

NB: And also, the intelligence quotient has a lot to do with it because if you’re dealing with a dyslexic child
that has average or above-average intelligence, it’s easier to teach them to internalize. If you have a child who has less of an IQ and difficulty, they might be even almost working commensurate with their IQ, so you always have to decide how much really they can —

JP: Well, it’s hard to test that.

NB: Psychologists test it and then they give us the results. I can do all kinds of academic testing where we measure academic success, but the discipline to decide whether a child has a learning disability is determined by a psychologist.

JP: So most of your students when you were at the Oral School would have been autistic, or was it a mix?

NB: It was a mix.

JP: You wouldn’t have any Down’s syndrome or anything like that, would you?

NB: I did not have any. There might’ve been one or two in the school — I can’t recall — but I didn’t have Down’s syndrome. The majority of the children in my class had learning disabilities and then there were one or two very high-functioning autistic children.
JP: So when you had finished your Master’s degree, what did you want to do at that point?

NB: Well, I think the school itself, I could feel the change coming and how it was becoming more autistic in the classrooms. I think a lot of it — and this is off the record because I'm not sure this so true, but I felt like it might’ve been a financial issue because Broward County would contract and be able to bring a better program, so their contracting needs, of course, would be more autistically oriented.

JP: But that would be a specific contract with Broward to treat autistic children?

NB: Right, but they were bringing in more autistic children. The program as I knew it, working with children with learning disabilities, really started to dwindle. So I took myself next-door to Dr. Elizabeth Brennan at the University School and said, “I’d like to apply for a job in general education. This is what I can do.” And it just so happened the following year she had an opening for a second grade teacher, so I took that job at the Lower School.

JP: Now, had you ever taught elementary school?
NB: Well, the children I taught at the Baudhuin School were elementary-school age.

JP: So were you teaching English and other things as well?

NB: Yeah, with the accommodations for those children. But I had all the training because I had gone back and gotten the certification from the state to be a general Ed teacher. So I went and I just... Of course, they had no programs really set up at that time for children who had learning disabilities. These children that were very bright were in the school. They hadn’t been identified, but they did have some learning problems.

So when I was there, the way we grouped the children was I took the majority of the children that we had doubt about, especially in second grade, and I would work with them. I absolutely loved it. It was great. We saw great progress. We were able to make connections with parents and tell them more specifically. So I was able to combine my elementary knowledge and -

JP: So this would’ve been in 1996 when you started?

NB: Right. That was my first year.
JP: Give me a little sense of what the University School was like at that time. Was it open classrooms? Did you group people according to their ability and sort of let them find their own niche and work at their own progress?

NB: Well, the University School, the Lower School especially, was very progressive. We did have open classrooms. It was open, very open. When I got there, there were only about —

JP: A little too open for second graders?

NB: Well, there were only about 450 kids and when we left there were 700, so you couldn’t have that in the same amount of space, so we expanded a couple of times. What happens is they all come in as a grade level — and we continue to do this at the Lower School — we divide them into color groups, we take information from testing and teachers’ reports and authentic assessments from the year before. We put them in color groups, all mixed up homogenously, and then we rotate them through each teacher on the team. There are five teachers on the team and each day you get a group of these children.

JP: Would you focus on English? Does each teacher have the team...?
NB: Well, this is just the first week of school.

JP: Oh, okay, you’re just getting started.

NB: We’re just getting started. What we do is we’re doing the same thing in all the classes on Monday, the same thing, and the kids would rotate through. Then, at the end of the week, the teachers sit down and collect all the data they’ve gotten and then we decide how to group the children more homogenously, so that children who have similar learning styles, skill levels, personalities are more grouped together so the teacher can focus more on... Say if you have really high readers and you’re able to move quickly with them, but there’s a group of children in the class that need more help, those children can’t possibly benefit. So what we do is we group the children that have those more similar needs. And it really isn’t tracking because it’s so developmental in elementary school that eventually the kids — every year they’re reassessed and every year they go to wherever —

JP: So you would as a teacher — I know at one point I was talking to Jerry about this. At one point, I know that each teacher had a pretty lengthy assessment of the student. “This is Mary-Lou Jones and this is what she is good at.” So at the end of the year —
NB: Strong visual learner, reads at a third-grade level, and so on and so forth, yeah.

JP: So as assessor at this point, you’ll know what you need to work on and then you can look at another year and say, “Well, she’s not progressed, so we need to go back and try something else.”

NB: It’s very data-driven that way, yeah.

JP: It is data-driven. Is that a negative or a positive?

NB: We feel it’s positive. We feel it’s positive because the data is really the truth in what their progress is. We have informal anecdotal where we talk about, “You’re not going to measure somebody socially if they’re not getting along with kids one year, but we’ve intervened and they’re having a great year. That’s not really data-driven. That’s more observationally driven.”

I believe in the data. I think the data truly helps us understand where children are.

JP: But this is more academic data.

NB: Yes.
JP: And one thing Jerry said is that you deal with the whole child.

NB: Absolutely.

JP: And so children who may well be great readers might be socially inept.

NB: Right and we look closely at that.

JP: So if you try to take a kid who’s a good reader and put him with other good readers, say, so they kind of reinforce and they have something in common and therefore they interact better?

NB: Yes. But if they’re having social problems, we might make a recommendation with the guidance counselor for that child to have a special intervention. But we do very much look at the whole child. We look at the child’s profile. So it wouldn’t just be a great reader. It’s very interesting when you say that. As we’re finding out, usually good students are good students in elementary school. And the children that are developmentally at a different place are developmentally at a different place. They’re going along and they all kind of end up in the same place at the end.
I think what we do very well in the Lower School is we know the whole child and where they are, what they need, and what we can do in order to make sure they’re successful in their developmental path up until middle school.

JP: How important is social background? There’s an old story that if the parents read and they encourage them to read, that kind of thing? If they come from a poor family and the father is no longer there, it’s got to be a little more difficult to shepherd these kids along.

NB: Well, it would be, but our school is tuition-based, so it’s a very –

JP: So you get high income?

NB: We have an affluent – yeah. Most of our parents are very educated, very driven, very competitive and sometimes that’s another issue. But we still have children, though, that are victim to divorces, to deaths in the family, to family illness. We do and we take very good care of those children as well.

JP: Don’t tell me you have kids in the second grade who are worried about getting into Harvard.

NB: Not children, but parents, yes.
JP: I know the parents, but sometimes that competitive edge puts a lot of pressure on a kid who’s seven years old. Why would a kid seven years old worry about going to Harvard?

NB: They shouldn’t.

JP: That’s an unfair burden it would seem to me to put on a child. You’d like your child to do well, but —

NB: Most definitely. You just want them to develop. As long as you give them the appropriate support and knowledge and instruction, they’re going to develop at their own pace.

JP: And they’re going to do it whether you want them to or not.

NB: Exactly. They do.

JP: You can’t do it for them and you can’t force them to do it. The best concept, what you’re — if you put them in the right environment, you can —

NB: Exactly. And you understand them and you know them. I have three good stories to tell. I had one child who was in my class, who was barely reading in second grade and rolling under the tables. We had a terrible time with
him. He went to Harvard on a full football scholarship – second grade to twelfth grade.

Another story is I had a young man, another one, who was bilingual. He had really a lot of problems learning how to read. In math he just had a lot of difficulty – full scholarship, early acceptance to Penn when he graduated. So if you build it...

And the last one was Alex Cortez, my favorite. This kid had such a severe learning disability. His verbal IQ was almost 140 and his non-verbal IQ – or was it the other way around? There was about a 30-point difference. He was severely learning disabled, but bright and smart – P.S. Brandeis in twelfth grade. So the school places them –

JP: What changed with those kids? Obviously, it’s not in two or three years; it’s a long thing. What changed? Let’s talk about the third kid who had more difficulties only because he had a learning disability. So how do you get a kid from that to Brandeis?

NB: Well, we identify his needs. We talk professionally to parents, help them seek outside assistance as needed. We needed to get a full psychological on him to know exactly – we knew something
was out of sync. So we get parent support. We have a staff and a faculty that have continual dialogue about children.

I’ll get a little ahead of myself here. When I did my doctorate, part of my dissertation what I identified was that general Ed teachers have difficulty servicing children that have learning disabilities in the general classroom. So all the research and everything... The result was I created a child study team in the Lower School. So going back to what you asked me, that child study team in place was a place for teachers to go to and receive help. He had a file this thick. We’d sit there and we’d say, “Well, try this with him. Try this with him. He has documentation. We can give him his test orally.”

JP: So in a way it’s a team approach –

NB: Very much so.

JP: – that enables somebody to use other people’s experience and knowledge.

NB: Absolutely.

JP: One of the problems that I see in the public schools today is there’s this focus on general testing. So
you take the test at the end of eighth grade, the FCATs, those exams. Do you do any of that?

NB: For our accreditation, we have to have a standardized test. We use the metropolitan test in the Lower School.

JP: I hope you don’t use the FCAT.

NB: We wouldn’t even think of it. We don’t teach to the test.

JP: Thank you.

NB: We don’t teach to the test. We teach to our curriculum and our test is reflective of our curriculum.

JP: So if you took your test instead of the FCAT, that’s acceptable to the state?

NB: Uh-huh. It definitely is a national-norm test, so definitely its acceptable anywhere.

JP: Now, that testing, do you do it because you have to or does it help you?

NB: I think that’s probably both true. I think we have to for accreditation and it’s helpful because it does – we’ve never been really surprised.
JP: It’s some marker.

NB: Yeah, it’s a benchmark. And you know what? We’ve never really been surprised with scores. Those kids test on those tests exactly where we’d expect for them to be, which I think speaks highly of our faculty, who team to the curriculum that reflects the grade levels. I’ll brag about the faculty. They’re great.

JP: One would think that was the way people should be educated, instead of teaching to a test, but that’s another issue. Is there an element here — you’ve got these kids. They would be, based on their background, highly motivated, wouldn’t they? Or do you have kids who are strung out and lazy?

NB: A mixture. We have some children that are highly motivated because they’re interested in learning. I think if you visited our school and you saw when kids came in and what they were doing in the classroom, you would see that they’re happy to be there, so they’re motivated to learn because of the interest the teachers create in the environment, and that’s really what it’s about and their friendships they make. We don’t have really desks in line at our school. They’re all at tables working collaboratively. We infuse the 21st century skills.
There’s lots of technology. It’s fun to be there, so I think they’re motivated —

JP: You don't necessarily have a structured day. You don't have third period, fourth period, that sort of thing?

NB: The teachers have their days divided by reading and math and content area, but we don't have bells. We do have some movement in third through fifth grade. Children go to a different math teacher because we regroup them for math. Like you said, you might be a great reader and a terrible math student, so we want you to be in the right place where you’re going to get the kind of instruction you need.

JP: Let me go back and ask something I forgot to ask you. When you first went to your graduate school at Nova, what was your impression of Nova as an educational institution?

NB: Well, I will tell you, I’ve been here in South Florida — my parents moved here in ’64/’65, so I’ve been here a long time, and Nova was never well thought of. Southeastern was a DO doctor place in North Miami Beach, where I originally am from. So was it the University of Pittsburgh? Was it Penn? No, but, boy, they were paying
for my education. I went to a few classes and I thought the instructors were fabulous. I absolutely loved it. I thought, “Well, I don't care what they call it. It’s a great school.” I learned so much here. You can’t even imagine. I learned so much.

JP: So your image and the reality were quite different?

NB: Were very different.

JP: And so when you started on your PhD, what was our ultimate goal at that point? I think you got into curriculum development and that sort of thing?

NB: I was in curriculum development, yes. I worked as a teacher, then the associate director. I moved into the associate director’s position when I had already started my doctorate degree, yeah.

JP: So you were interested in admin from the beginning?

NB: Not really. I was really just interested in making the school better. I thought that being in a position in administration would... I had done an instructional facilitation with some grades and I thought, “Boy, this is great. I could work with all of these
teachers.” But being so naïve and being I guess too right-brained, I didn’t realize the pressures and the expectations of an administrator.

Here I am this teacher. I think back from when I graduated from college and I got a college teaching Engagement in Carol City High School. A teacher had left. I probably should’ve asked why. They needed a substitute. That was in 1971. I went in there thinking these high school kids were just as interested as I was in Charles Dickens. [laughter]

JP: A huge mistake.

NB: A big mistake—several mistakes. First of all, the class I had was all the kids nobody else wanted, and it was in an area that wasn’t—I don’t know if you’re familiar with Carol City, but it’s in an area that was really not even middle class at that time. I was this idealistic person, so I guess I made that mistake twice in my life because I went into administration thinking that same way, thinking, “Oh, I’m going to be a service leader. I’m going to help all these teachers.” Then all of a sudden I’m in charge of facilities and then I’m in charge of after-school activities. It was like, “Oh, whoa, there’s got to be something better than this?”
JP: Did you miss the classroom?

NB: Oh, so badly. I still do.

JP: But do you still have an opportunity to periodically go back in and spend some time in the classroom?

NB: Well, that’s the advantage of being the principle. You get to do what you want to do. [laughter] Is that terrible? Don't repeat that. But I do go in and recognize children, sit in on classes, read them stories. Am I able to go in and actually teach? No, because there are so many responsibilities in that school with almost 730 children under the age of ten. It’s a lot.

JP: Now, the Lower School goes from prekindergarten to five and there are 700 —

NB: Almost 730 children in there.

JP: That’s a lot.

NB: That’s a lot to be responsible for.

JP: So the new development is going to give you more space?
NB: No. The new development is going to give more space to sports.

JP: Oh, that’s right, new gym.

NB: The new gym, right. So whether that will ultimately help us, I'm not sure, but we’re okay in our space; we really don't want to expand. We do have six fifth grades this year. We like to have a five-teacher team.

JP: Jerry said that he didn’t think it was going to be a feasible prospect to try to get over 2,000 students. I think he said it was around 1,900 of something like that now.

NB: Yeah.

JP: He didn’t even want pedagogically or physically to expand too far. Then you get kids who are paying a lot of money to go to school there who are not getting the kind of attention they should.

NB: I think we’re pretty much at our max. The middle school is maxed out. I think with that middle school being the Baudhuin School it has low ceilings and the classrooms are smaller. I know the high school is filled. I think
elementary school has always met our goal. I think this year the reason we haven’t is several-fold.

We’re about 40 students under what our goal number would be; however, we’re in competition with the VPK program. People are paying $6,000 for a VPK program that we’re asking them to pay $15,000 or whatever the prekindergarten charges. I'm not sure. I think its $13,000 or $15,000 for a prekindergarten program. A lot of parents don’t see — if I want to send my child to private school, why should I waste the money on pre-k? They haven’t been sold on the idea that it’s definitely a pre-K to 12 program.

JP: As it turns out, that’s the most important time.

NB: Yes, it really is. We’ve lost several students there, in that mostly. And then of course we’ve lost people to the economy. A lot of people have said —

JP: Yeah. How much is it a year, $20,000 a year?

NB: It’s $15,000 or $16,000 a year.

JP: For Lower School?

NB: For Lower School. And parents feel, “If I'm going to send them to private school, maybe I should wait
until middle school and high school?” They live in affluent communities. Their elementary schools are —

JP: Just all the way around.

NB: Yeah, they should.

JP: And may I ask you about your salary? Both as a teacher and now as an administrator, is your salary comparable to the public schools or better than?

NB: Less than.

JP: Less than?

NB: Yes. My salary at this time is below, much below the principal’s salary at a public school.

JP: Much below?

NB: For the years of experience I have, the amount of time I’ve been in the position.

JP: So you teach there because the quality of the school and the quality of the kids, so you’re willing to take less money —

NB: I just absolutely love it, yeah. I absolutely think the school itself — the philosophy of the school I’ve always bought into. I feel like I’m an intricate part of
the school. I developed a program called the AIP that is part of our school now. It houses 48 children with learning disabilities that are mainstreamed after they receive this, right in our school. That was part of a program that I brought to the school. I just love being there and seeing children be successful. I know it sounds kind of hokey, but it’s really what I enjoy doing. I'm 63 years old. I'm not going to fool anybody. It’s really what I enjoy doing.

JP: I understand also there’s no tenure. Maybe for principals — I don't know. Is this a one-year contract?

NB: There’s no tenure. Teacher is a one-year contract. I'm on a 12-month letter, as they call it, with evaluations.

JP: So are you evaluated by the headmaster?

NB: Yeah, Jerry does.

JP: And so there are five principals, as it were?

NB: Three. There’s myself, Donna Poland is the middle school principle and Bill Kopas is the high school principal.
JP: Okay. And in the long term do you work with the headmaster to set overall policy?

NB: Jerry works directly with the three of us. He’s our immediate supervisor and he works directly with us. Policies are written as needed. We work directly with him. We discuss those kinds of things with him before we put policies into place.

JP: What’s your interaction now with Nova University?

NB: Well, we do a lot of collaborative programs with the different divisions.

JP: Are you talking about research programs now?

NB: Some research. We act as a venue for student teachers, for people who need clinical hours from the speech and language department, from the psychology department — we have a partnership with them now — and we have a doctorate fellow that works with us. So we do a lot of collaboration. But a few years ago I was teaching online in the Master’s program, so I taught online in Master’s and I taught an undergraduate class as well. So I taught at the college and at the graduate level.
JP: Well, in a real sense — and I know a little bit about what used to be... Every school had an attached school to them, like P.K. Yonge and the University of Florida.

NB: Right, lab schools.

JP: Lab schools as they call them. I didn’t want to use that term because I hate the idea. It sounds like they’re rats or something.

NB: I know, but I think we are considered a lab school.

JP: Well, and what I was coming to would it would be a great benefit to be right here with the university. If you have a neurological problem, you’ve got a health center here. You’ve got psychologists. You can interact. You’ve got teachers who can come and learn from your environment. It’s a progressive kind of school. I know enough to know that, for example, P.K. Yonge has sort of not become the kind of school it — at one point everybody, even the faculty, wanted to send their kids to P.K. Yonge. It’s just not quite as good. Part of that is leadership. Part of that is money. Part of that is commitment on the part of the university. Abe Fischler just took [Mikey Sewell] School and brought it over here and put it on the campus.
NB: I feel very strong support at this university for us, for our division. I think they recognize us as an intricate part of their university. And having so many different experiences here — graduate school, undergraduate studies, teaching, graduate teaching, students — I never felt unsupported by the university.

JP: Good.

NB: I do. I have a really good feeling about that.

JP: Jerry said yesterday, he said that he felt that as one of the 16 deans that he was accorded proper respect. It wasn’t like he was some high school teacher who didn’t belong sitting around the table with the dean of the health professions. He said he felt no... And obviously enough money has come in or they wouldn’t be able to build a gym.

NB: Absolutely, or our building, for that matter.

JP: You could let that go if the university were not intent on maintaining a high-quality school.

NB: Right. Well, I was very lucky. Jerry allowed me to be included in the design of the school, so I went to all the meetings. George Hanbury was there and John Santulli, so I really could watch the process and some of the obstacles with the university thinking, “Oh, we just
want the school and we need the school.” Then you start to realize all the other things that come into play when you’re part of a large university like this. So I have respect for that, but I never felt unsupported. I always felt like they were going to give us the school we needed. I felt like they’d give us the support. Even just recently we got an email from Dr. Hanbury about raises that boosted the morale of the teachers in the school so much.

JP: It usually does.

NB: I feel like the university cares about us, I really do.

JP: I know George does.

NB: Yeah. I really feel like they really care about us.

JP: I think the way Jerry described it to me, there is a discount — something like 35% or something — for faculty kids. Do you have many of them?

NB: We do. There’s a discount if you work for the University School or for the university period. It used to be more at the University School. If you worked there, you got 50, but they changed it for incoming people. So it’s 35% across the board, which is more like most other lab
schools do. We have a lot of students from faculty in the university, and we also have a lot of parents that work in the school that get the discount as well. We do get that discount.

JP: And do the teachers now – can they still take courses at Nova at a reduced cost or for free?

NB: I think they’ve changed some of the policy. I'm not sure because I'm a little removed from that, but I think now you have to wait. Before I could take classes after my 90 days, now I believe you wait six months until you’re even eligible for a discount anywhere or even the starting of classes. I wouldn’t take my word for it, but I think that’s how they changed it. Yeah, I think that’s what they did. When I went for my doctorate, I paid nothing for that doctorate degree except virtual taxes, which really was wonderful, too. I think I paid $475 taxes every six months. It’s an advantage.

JP: Yeah. Well, and if you look at the circumstances of student loans these days –

NB: Oh, absolutely.

JP: You could’ve had a significant –
NB: I probably wouldn’t have done it because I had two children in college at the time. [laughter]

JP: That makes it a little harder, doesn’t it?

NB: That makes it a little harder.

JP: Tell me about teaching online. What do you think of it?

NB: I thought it was really — at first I was hesitant. I said, “Okay, I'm going to try it and see what it’s like.” Actually, I grew to like it because you get to talk to — I was teaching teachers reading.

JP: You’re teaching people all over the country?

NB: Yeah and all over the world. We had people from Holland that had to wake up in two o'clock in the morning to come to our chat. We had people from Iran. Yeah, people had signed up. It was fun.

JP: So your object was to train teachers at your level?

NB: Yeah, to teach them, to work with them to have dialogue with each other, to learn at a higher level of application from what they already knew, to go outside the box.
JP: Is this at a Master’s level?

NB: Master’s level. Undergraduate, I taught specific learning disability classes.

JP: In this group, how many would you have?

NB: I think there were 21 people. I want to say “kids,” but most of them probably weren’t kids. They’d send me their papers. Some of them were still—the older teachers would send them hard copy, in the mail, and the younger ones would send them electronically. The older teachers said, “We don’t trust it.” I said, “That’s fine. Send it however you’re most comfortable.”

JP: So you would have a class meeting, like say at seven o’clock, and they’d all have to log on, right?

NB: They’d call it a chat, yeah.

JP: Is this a stack?

NB: A chat, C-H-A-T, a chat room. They’d all get in on WebCT—was it WebCT? You know something? It’s been a while and they’ve change so many of the platforms, but it was… They’d all get on there and I’d take attendance, but of course I wouldn’t know if it was really them. I wouldn’t know if they were having dinner out and had it on
their computer there. But I always could observe who was actively involved in the conversation.

JP: But it was all over the keyboard.

NB: Mm-hm.

JP: So this was before virtual classrooms.

NB: Oh, yeah.

JP: Now you can see everybody as they come in and they can speak back. That’s a little hard to have to interact like that.

NB: It was a lot of typing, a lot of typing.

NB: I know these kids today —

NB: Yeah, but it was fun. Honestly, I did it for a while. Before I finished my doctorate, I was — I think we called it a mentor. I worked with Dr. Elizabeth Brennan. I worked with her as a mentor. As soon as I received my doctorate, they gave me a full class, because you can’t teach graduate without a doctorate degree. So I was a mentor and I had a group of students. So when I went to teach in a full class, it wasn’t so bad and I already kind of knew the ins and outs. But I enjoyed it. It was fun talking to different teachers.
JP: Do you still do that?

NB: When I started, when I took over this job as director principal of the Lower School, I did give it up. It was just the job was overwhelming, especially in the beginning. It was a lot.

JP: When you’ve got 700-something kids, you don't have time.

NB: And we were in the old building. We were in the process of creating the new building. It was the transition time. The person who had been there before me was there 15 years and had developed most of the program, so I really wanted – even though I worked as an associate director with her, there were a lot of things I wanted to wait to see if we could change. It was more intense.

JP: Tell me a little bit about what you do with after-school activities for the young kids and how much you integrate what one might call play/recreation in the context of learning.

NB: That’s a really interesting question. We’ll start with after-school activities. We have an organized program called Cultural Arts. In Cultural Arts, children
have an opportunity to choose from a variety of different activities: cheerleading, music lessons, chess —

JP: Cheerleading?

NB: We have cheerleaders in the Lower School. You should see how cute they are. I don't know what they cheer for, they just cheer. They’re so cute. It’s just very cute. The girls love it. We had them cheer with the high school cheerleaders at homecoming. They’re cute. They’re little pipsqueaks, kindergarten. But it boosts school spirit, which is kind of nice. Chess after school —

JP: Chess?

NB: Oh, absolutely. We have a strong Lower School Chess Program. We have children that play on teams.

JP: These little kids play chess?

NB: Oh, yeah. They start learning in pre-K.

JP: What about languages? What languages do you teach?

NB: Spanish, but it’s very difficult with the time of day. Students have a regular Spanish class ever seven days.
JP: Everybody takes it?

NB: Everybody takes it. And then they have an intervention in their classroom once a week more informally with another teacher that comes in and speaks dialogue with them. So we don’t expect them to be fluent, but by fifth grade we expect them to have some words and an understanding of some of the language. This way, it kind of—

JP: It’s good to start them being aware of that at a younger age because it gets harder and harder to learn languages as you get older, and the system in our school is not very much geared towards language proficiency, unfortunately. What about athletics in the context? Do they have games? Do they have sports teams?

NB: After school or during the day?

JP: Both.

NB: Okay, so after school we have organized sports: basketball leagues, we have a lacrosse team—these are children in elementary school. I wouldn’t really say it’s a team because they don’t compete against anybody but themselves, but they’re learning the game. Golf, flag football, where they pull flags down.
JP: Do these extracurricular activities cost extra?

NB: Yeah. There is a charge for them because we have to pay the teachers to teach them. We have karate. You name it, we have it. Dance class, acting class, debate, forensics – there are a multitude of choices.

JP: Jerry mentioned that. I had talked to a woman who also got her degree at Nova Southeastern who is at an art school in West Palm, Dreyfoos. It’s an art and music school.

NB: Like magnet school?

JP: Yeah.

NB: Like high school kids?

JP: Yeah. It’s like going to Julliard, except it’s in West Palm.

NB: Oh, cool.

JP: And he was saying that that was one of the main focal points of your school and that they really encourage the arts and music and there’s a performing arts center. And even at a young age kids are encouraged to sing or dance or be on stage or play an instrument or whatever.
NB: Well, that’s part of educating the whole child, giving them opportunities to seek out what they like.

JP: I had a good friend who – there’s a school in North Carolina that’s an arts school. It’s, again, the Julliard for North Carolina. She was interested in oboe and ended up playing in the New York Philharmonic, so she was pretty good. But she said she got a terrible education because the focus was too much on proficiency and skill in your instrument and less so on English and math. Obviously, from what Jerry was saying, this is an overview where you’re trying to integrate art and music into the curriculum as opposed to the other way around.

NB: Absolutely. You know what happens? These children are exposed to so many things in the Lower School and you watch them grow up. From all those activities they were in, you can see them start picking and choosing the few they like. Then they end up in high school. If it’s a child that’s really interested in dance and theater and music, you see that child eventually become involved in the arts. If there is a child who was signed up for every athletic, you see them eventually in high school find the sport that they like. It’s interesting. Providing them
the opportunities, so many that we can, so that the children can find what they enjoy doing the most.

JP: Jerry told me that you guys were doing the Laramie Project. That’s pretty heavy-duty. Would the young kids be involved in that?

NB: We were not. We extended the Human Dignity Week. It coincided with Red Ribbon Week, which is universal; you know that. We had a kickoff assembly, talked about human dignity, and we spiced up the guidance program for the week to focus on name-calling, tolerance and acceptance. So we aligned the basic character traits that hopefully avoid those types of situations.

JP: That would be a little traumatic for young kids, I would think.

NB: It’s too much. The closest we came to was using the “gay” word. Children use it constantly in a negative way, and so we tried to incorporate that with name-calling, and we concentrated on grades three through five. We said, “These are words that you shouldn’t call people.” Stupid and so on, and we listed gay as one of the words because they use it so... It’s offensive to people who are gay and these kids don’t even realize. They’re young, but it’s
offensive and it’s something they should know is not okay to use, because culturally it’s… We didn’t say gay itself; we just said “name-calling.” So it’s probably the only connection we had with really any of the —

JP: Do you have problem with bullying?

NB: Everyone has a problem with bullying.

JP: What do you do?

NB: First of all, it’s not really a problem, I don’t think. It’s oftentimes a misunderstanding of what bullying actually is, educating parents and children as to what really a bully is and what just some social conflict is.

JP: So if a little boy pushes down a little girl, that’s not necessarily bullying.

NB: It’s not unless he’s continually walking around pushing kids down. Then he’s a bully and we have to address that. But if they have a conflict and he does push her down, we have a consequence for putting your hands on anybody and there’s a consequence for that kind of behavior, but certainly that’s not being a bully.

JP: What is the consequence?
NB: Consequence is, first of all, a half-day reflection time in the office, call your parents. You come into school and you spend a half a day in the administrative office thinking about better ways. It’s after we’ve counseled them and we’ve spoken to them. It’s not just like, “You did it.” “You shouldn’t do this, so tomorrow you’re going to spend time thinking about what we discussed in either Dr. Barnes’ office, Dr. [Lavine’s] office, but you’ve got to sit up here with us and have lunch up here and by yourself for a half a day think about what you’ve done.”

JP: How do you keep them still?

NB: They sit like this because their parents have spoken to them. Then, if it continues, it’s a full-day in-house suspension. Then if we do have problems with that particular child with continuously hurting other children, then we ask for the parents to get some outside help. We ask them to keep them home from school until they can bring a note from a psychologist that would indicate he’s not at harm for himself or any other child.

JP: And in your case that’s a viable alternative because these parents can afford it and they understand the benefit of it.
NB: Absolutely.

JP: If you were back in Carol City, there wouldn’t be a hope.

NB: No. That would be a whole different story.

JP: Which is part of what’s the benefit for you in your job because you can really see some changes in these kids and improvements in these kids because you have a structure that’s supportive, parents, the advisory board, other teachers, and collectively you can see progress.

NB: Absolutely.

JP: And it’s small enough that – 720 is a lot, but if you were teaching at a public school…

When you look at what you want to do from this point on, what’s your plan? Are you going to stay in administration?

NB: Well, I feel like my job isn’t done there yet. I have several things in mind that I’d like to… That’s one thing about Nova. They teach you to be a thinker. That’s something I think in all their programs. I can’t speak for those disciplines like psychology, but in any of the educational programs I’ve been in, they teach you to be a
thinker, be a project seeker and think out of the box, school improvement, in any of the educational classes I’ve taken.

Every time I read The New York Times or I read an article and I think, “Wow, yeah, that’s something we should be doing.” I start trying to focus myself on that. And until I lose that energy, I think I would like to stay in administration because I have finally come to peace with the fact that being an administrator does impact children, teachers and everybody else. It took me a long time to get there.

JP: Do you want to stay in the Lower School?

NB: I do – I love the Lower School – unless Jerry puts me somewhere else, but I doubt it seriously because I really am not credentialed. I could be middle school, but high school I’d be way out of my element.

JP: As an alumnus of Nova, do you feel like Nova maintains some contact with you? Does the Alumni Association send you information about what’s going on?

NB: Call for money and everything. [laughs]

JP: Of course, you’re close by.
NB: They do. They make phone calls to the house. They send mailings, they do.

JP: But not just for raising money, to allow you to know what’s going on at the university?

NB: Information. Yeah, I think they do.

JP: Well, one thing I notice is they don’t put out one of these slick alumni magazines like other schools have.

NB: No, they don’t. I just thought about that. That’s what I was thinking. I’m thinking, I wonder if I even get a newsletter from them. I get one in-house here for what’s going on at the university, but I don’t get one at home.

JP: A lot of people don’t. That is something that the new administration wants to know if they should change.

NB: Oh, I think that’s — yeah.

JP: You don’t want to lose contact. Understandably, this is an unusual group of graduates. Some of the people with degrees have never been on the campus.

NB: True, absolutely.
JP: Many of them are adults. It’s not a large undergraduate population. So it’s a little bit different kind of alumni group than normally, but it seems to me, from the people I’ve talked with, they need to get a little more focused on how to relate to the alumni they do have.

NB: I agree with that, yeah.

JP: They haven’t quite gotten it. But again, once of the things I’ve learned about this school is they’ve sort of developed as they can. When they first started out, they didn’t have any money for buildings.

NB: They didn’t have money for paychecks. One paycheck I had a hold until the following week. But it was true. I had to hold that paycheck until the following week because they didn’t have monies to pay.

JP: I’ve heard that. That wasn’t as bad as it was. In 1969 they went bankrupt.

NB: No, that was before I came. I was still in college then, I think.

JP: But even when you were here, they were still having some financial problems. So until they got in the black, then when Ray Ferrero came, they started building some buildings. Without that, you don't have the
infrastructure to expand. And then the merger and abortion access, boom, there was a dramatically different campus than when you got here, right?

NB: Absolutely. It’s way different.

JP: Are you proud of your degree from Nova?

NB: I am. I have it hanging in my office. I am very proud. My mother is very proud. My husband is very proud, my kids. As a matter of fact, I have two grandchildren in the Lower School, one in kindergarten and one in second grade. My daughter taught in the Lower School before she had her first children and is now a teacher aide in the middle school, probably just to get the discount, I'm sure. But we’ve kind of been a Nova family. My husband got a degree here in dispute resolution, a graduate degree many years ago, so he went to school. We’ve been kind of attached to Nova for a while.

JP: That’s good. I'm glad you put it that way, a Nova family. There wouldn’t be a lot of people in that category, where both had their degrees from Nova and the kids are —

NB: Are here and my grandchildren are here, so it’s really —
JP: That’s nice.

NB: I'm comfortable enough to do that, bring people here. Yeah, I brought many of my friends here for other kinds of graduate studies.

JP: Are you pleased in general with the basic problems of working at a university: parking, transportation, all of that sort of thing? Are your perks, your healthcare, retirement — is all of that good, acceptable, inferior? How would you rate that?

NB: I think the retirement program is excellent. I’ve been involved in that for a very long time. I think that it’s excellent. It’s structured well. They have meetings. Like I said, it feels like they care about what’s going to happen to you. I think the health program they have, BlueCross BlueShield, offers a lot of options for people in different monetary categories. I think that it’s a very good program, it really is.

Parking? Parking is parking at any university. It just so happens I have a parking space with my name on it. [laughter] How lucky is that, right? After 20 years — so does Jerry, by the way, right next to mine. I think parking for us, like for our constituents, our parents and
visitors, there is not enough parking, no. I think that it’s almost like we’re outgrowing the parking space at this university. There are so many more students.

JP: I talked to John Santulli about that today. You’d be happy to know they’re going to build some parking garages.

NB: Yes!

JP: Obviously, at the University School, you would have a lot of parents coming for a lot of occasions, more so than — other than the health professions — any other building but maybe the library. But by and large, you’re going to have an influx of parents constantly, right?

NB: Constantly. I will tell you a fine example. Jerry, I don't know he shared this with you or not. Yesterday, the UFO, which is our PTA —

JP: He did tell me about it. He said when he first heard it he said, “That’s not going to work.” [laughter]

NB: Well, they had a shopping bazaar on the campus, but they asked teachers — teachers could not park in their parking spaces, none of the teachers in all three divisions. They gave options. You could park at HPD and get a shuttle or you could park here and get a shuttle.
Now, you can imagine how teachers were feeling at that point.

JP: How?

NB: “We’re grossly underpaid. We can’t even go to the bathroom during the day because we can’t leave our classroom. We’re here until five o’clock. I come at seven when it’s dark. And now they’re asking me to walk to work?” As it turned out, the fear was worse than what it really was, the anxieties were worse because it really worked out okay. But that kind of thing shouldn’t have to happen. You know what I mean? And everybody knew it was for the best and there weren’t any bad feelings, but that kind of thing really shouldn’t have to happen.

JP: But for morale –

NB: Yes.

JP: Like most cases, it’s an added element.

Everything is a little dicey anyway with pay and all this stuff. If you add one more thing –

NB: Not only that, if you have your kids with you, you have to bring them. Really, teachers were beside themselves. I felt it was my job to like – I went to UFO and I said, “I hope you have something special planned for
the teachers because they’re sort of having a hard time figuring out why they’re parking far so parents can come and shop.”

JP: It’s called money.

NB: It’s called money. I said, “Well, we’re going to benefit from this. We’re going to be fundraising money. What about an extra celebration?”

JP: I know you need to get back, so I won’t keep you much longer. How much trouble do you have with parents? We hear about these helicopter parents. We hear about –

NB: Tiger mom.

JP: We about tiger moms. We hear about your kid didn’t do well and it’s your fault. Most of them, I presume, are supportive, but you must have a few that are a real problem that you have to deal with on a constant basis.

NB: I think when you have the nature of about 1,500 adults that go with 700-something children – maybe 1,500 plus – you have to figure that there are a lot of personalities in there. We had a mom this morning screaming at an associate director because she wanted to walk her child down, things like that. I would say that as
a whole dealing with parents, if you listen to them and validate them and have information that persuades them to your thinking, you’re usually okay because they’re mostly intelligent. There are those that’ll fly off the handle over anything. That happens if you work in Nordstrom’s. It’s going to happen.

In general, we have mostly educated parents who need convincing in a lot of ways because they all feel their children are gifted. Of course, when we say to them, “Your child really needs to be in a class where the pace is slower because they’re losing their confidence — it doesn’t mean they’re not going to go to Harvard, it just means that right now developmentally…” And then come with the data and come with the info, they’re okay.

JP: “That’s not right. My child is brilliant!”

NB: They’re all brilliant in the Lower School. If you pay for the education, they’re brilliant. [laughs] What I find is the majority of our parents are pretty good. We have some nut jobs, but we know who they are.

JP: You know who they are, so you understand where they’re coming from and that makes it a little easier to deal with them.
NB: Absolutely. We know which parents will be provoked by certain things.

JP: In a way it’s good because they care about the kids. In that sense, most of them —

NB: It’s funny. That’s how we rationalize it. We know that it’s not hateful to me; it’s because they’re concerned about their child. It’s hard sometimes, though, to swallow it. Some of them beat up the teachers pretty bad.

JP: I know they do. “My kid sprained his knee while he was on the playground. Weren’t you watching him?”

NB: Exactly. “How’d that happen?” “Well, he was running and his ankle twisted.”

JP: Does the kid ever skin his knee at home?

[laughs]

NB: They’re not allowed out at home. They stay in with their nannies and do —

JP: Is there anything that we haven’t discussed that you’d like to talk about, either your experience as a student at Nova or your time at the University School?
NB: No. I think the nice thing is the University School reflects a great deal the same philosophy as Nova. That’s something I realize. And like I said, there are opportunities. If you want to be a leader, you can be a leader. I think the people that you deal with – like today we had a meeting with the psychology department, Dr. Cash. We’re collaborating with the doctorate fellow that we have. It was a pleasure. We all kind of think the same way. Everybody is very collaborative. I shouldn’t say everyone, but the people we deal with seem to have the same general philosophies. I think I said that before, not to repeat myself, but it’s that feeling of being part of the same whole that I think exists here. I think Ray Ferrero brought a great deal of it with him. I knew the presidents before. Of course, Abe officially was a king in his own right and remains to be still, but the guy before him, the little guy with the dark hair, I forget what his name was.


NB: Yes. He used to drink at a bar at our country club. I used to see him all the time. He brought a lot of foliage or something.

JP: He did. He planted trees.
NB: Yeah, he planted trees. But when he left and Ray Ferrero came in, you could almost like — being so involved in being in classes and teaching at all different levels, you could feel the paradigm shifting. It really shifted when he took over. He made a lot of differences. I know George Hanbury worked closely with him. I'm hoping it continues. So far he’s had community meetings, given everyone a voice.

JP: Of course, George and Ray are two different personalities. [laughs]

NB: Yes. You can tell right away they are two different personalities, but that’s healthy, too.

JP: But they worked together for all those years.

NB: All those years, yeah. I know. I'm looking forward to the successes. This university I think has a great future in the community also.

JP: Well, its better known in the community now than it was. Twenty years ago, nobody knew who was out there or what they did.

NB: They would say, “Nova? Why would you go to Nova to get a degree when you could go to UF? That’s more substantial.” It’s a whole different story now.
JP: Well, on that note, let’s end our conversation. Thank you very much.

[End]