

**B e a u ( J o a n ) B a s i l B e a u d o i n**

*Okay, it is June 14, 2001 and this is an interview with Beau Basil Beaudoun.*

Great.

**Over the first hurdle. Okay, could you tell us when did you come to Columbia and what were the circumstances that brought you to the college?**

Okay. I came to Columbia in 1986, as a part time instructor in the Television Department. And what I tell my students is that I came here because of a fight I had with the then chairman, Ed Morris. And what this boils back to is that I was here as a student the year previous. I already had a master's degree and I was teaching in the Chicago public schools and I wanted to get a few extra courses in television production.

I was a chairman of a TV production facility in Chicago. And Thaine Lyman was the old chair of the TV Department, was still the chair here when I started. And I had taken some courses—done some course work here and then when Thaine passed and Ed Morris came on as chair I believe it was his first semester. At that time I, I took two courses. I signed up for two courses and those were the last two that I was going to take. And one of them got cancelled and another one had a teacher that I felt was really a poor teacher.

And I'm usually not someone who complains much but I made an appointment to see Ed Morris. And I told him that I was unhappy with the teacher, that didn't seem to

know much more than I did, and also I was unhappy that I was told that a course I expected to take was cancelled because of lack of enrollment. I guess because it was an advanced course. And we had a conversation and he looked at my record and he said, "why are you even here?"

"You have more credentials than, than the teacher that was teaching you. That's why, and it's not his fault." And he—and I continued to sort of put my case out in front of him, and he said, "well if you're so smart why aren't you teaching here?" And I said, "you know what, I'll take the challenge because I'll teach here as a part-timer, just until I make enough money to pay for tuition that I've put into this place." And it was sort of like well we'll see this. Well I'll see this.

And it was funny because Ed is known to be just the curmudgeon, that he likes to be known as that. And I just wasn't going to back down to him. And it was, it was a friendly argument but he said, "okay, well why don't you teach these classes?" Then I said, "okay." You know it was sort of a funny situation the way it happened. Then I started teaching here part-time and continued to work in, in another full time job as many of us do for a while.

And then he finally asked me to come on full-time. And I left my other jobs. I was a—I had a production company, a corporate production company and I was still working at the schools. And he persuaded me to come on full time. I'm really happy about that. But it, it—it did start out with a—with actually an argument.

**What—do you know what year that was that you became full time?**

You know, I think it was '90.

**What brought you to Columbia as a student? How did you, you know, hear about it and what was its reputation?**

Oh, actually I heard about it from some of my students. I was teaching at a place called Hirsh High School, on 77th and Cottage Grove. It had the dubious distinction of being one of the worst high schools in the City of Chicago in a school district that was known to be one of the worst school districts in the nation. So it's really nice to have that reputation. And it was an all Black inner city high school. And I really—I'm an old hippie.

I volunteered to work there because I always thought we could change the world with having, giving students who didn't have all the advantages a new way to learn. And I, I'm—I have an education degree from DePaul from way back in, in



the early 70s. But I always believed that traditional methods of teaching didn't work for everybody, and I thought that the students that were given this bad rap, were given it, because maybe they couldn't read exactly.

And I had proposed using more video and using other ways, televisions to teach the students that I was lucky enough that the people at the board listened to me, and I developed a, a television program at Hirsh High School from the ground up. I mean there was none and I was able to get the right grants, get money, and get support. And the school was falling apart. It had a lot of gang problems. It had a lot of typical inner city problems. The typical student at that time which was in the—I think it was the late 70s.

It's all kind of a blur, as old as I am. They read 3.9. I do know that because my master's degree is in psychology and counseling and I worked partly as a counselor with them in those days. And that means third grade, kids that are 17 and 18 and their level is third grade reading. And the school had an opportunity to change it to a school that would have an emphasis on media. And I knew about such things, but didn't have any paper work that proved that I did. And so, um, I started teaching this video program over there and using video to teach other things.

And the powers that be said, "you know it would really better if we could just prove, you know, what you're doing because technically it's sort of illegal for a person who has a music education degree to be teaching video." And so, a couple of my students said that they understood that Columbia was a cool place because you didn't need

entrance exams to get in. And a few of the kids who did make it to college did come here and they're African American kids who scored really poorly on typical ACT's and I really found out about it from the students, which I think is cool.

**Yeah.**

And I came over here and talked to a couple of people and I said, "I already have an advanced degree but can I get a masters in television." They said, "no, there's no such thing. But you can take course work in television and we'll help set you up." And the people who were here at the time asked me really a lot of questions about what I wanted to do. And they—everybody was helpful. The people that were there—there were very few full time teachers at the time.

**Right.**

So I'm mostly talking about part timers who aren't even here anymore really.

**Do you remember some of their names just so they're on record at some of those—**

Well of course Thaine Lyman was the first one.

**Right.**

There was a person here named Rob Bernard, who left shortly after I came and actually Al Parker was an interim chain of radio and television for a while and he didn't know a lot about television. But he did give me some other names of people in the business that could tell me who to study with. Well one of the people who's still here is Rich Barnel. He's still a part time instructor about 20 years later. But they were very helpful to me, and then of course we just sort of navigated through what I knew and what I needed to know.

And I wound up having—I, I didn't go for that reason but I actually have a second BA in television production. Some of it I of course achieved through life experience credit and things like that. But it was great up until the last two courses when I had that fight with Ed Mannig.

**Could you elaborate a bit more on that part of your philosophy with the new ways of learning for students that—disadvantaged that don't—didn't have access to it?**

Yes.

**And really if you could talk about the origins of it and how it has developed and evolved.**

I'm really glad you asked that. I really feel that, I feel I had a lot of bad teachers in my life and I was a good student. And I think this approach of the teacher being the holder of all knowledge is just garbage. And I think that's how come we reward the quotes "good students," you know, the ones who do what they're supposed to do.

And I think when I was at Hirsh High school and we had 80 and 90% failure rates in so many of the courses that I was in. It doesn't make sense to me that we blame the students. If you have that many failures and that was really an unpopular thing to say. I still have friends who are working in the board of education and we still have arguments about that.

I do understand that the problems with the Chicago schools are not because we have bad teachers. It's a social problem. It's that kids—when I become queen of the universe I am going to insist that pregnant women are in some kind of parenting classes. It should be free and open to everyone. We should be doing something like

head start from six months-old. I would just observe driving to Hirsh High School the difference between the way I would have my son, who was an infant, in the car next to me and how I would be chatting and talking to him about nothing because I so much believed in just having conversations, even though I'm using four syllable words instead of goo-goo.

And I'd see parents next to me, who would because they were tired, because they don't know any better, because of a lot of circumstances, just were not saying a word to their kids. Their kids were not talking and it's probably a personal thing about language and brainwork coming together. And maybe, because I'm so talkative or gregarious myself, but I just really feel that we should be having some way to help parents to learn how to get their kids into caring about language and carrying about thinking and being confident to read and talk to anybody at a really early age.

And the kids that were failing so much were really failing because people were standing in front of a classroom hollering at them about how stupid they were and reminding them how they couldn't read. And the things that the kids cared about, like singing songs—this was before rap or reciting words of songs or doing things like that, or knowing sport scores and all of that. I mean I read about it, but I just—I wasn't reinventing the wheel, but I just noticed that if you get to where they're at they're going to be a lot more interested. And so, I just began showing videos in my classes.

I began putting my kids in a circle before I read who does that. I back you out of the circle and say that you guys got to run to class. I

began doing peer evaluations for everything. I came up with an idea that my principal disallowed. But I refused to ever give grades. I said this—"if our country is based on a democracy for people, vote for who's smart and who's president and everything else. Why don't we start right now with you all have to grade each other in the class."

And I get one vote—maybe I, I think I saw—I get two votes. But if there was a class of 30 kids you'd all have to rate each other and how do you know what they're doing unless we read each other's papers, or unless we do some kind of recitations where we hear each other? And it was amazing how, after a while, they were harder on each other—they were failing each other when I was giving them C's. They were like, "he didn't talk at all in class today or she didn't do this or that." And I just tried to find ways where they would take ownership.

And it was kind of liberal thinking in the 70s, I guess. And part of it is because I just have a hard time probably failing students myself. I just didn't understand why I should be an outsider coming making judgments about who's smart, who's—how do you determine what's ability? And when you give kids other ways to express themselves rather than traditional—I mean I'm not saying that reading and writing and arithmetic isn't necessary.

I'm just saying there are ways to demonstrate how smart you are in other ways. And once you have the confidence to show that you're really good with a video camera or really good at dancing or really good at rapping or something, then you have the confidence that maybe you can do the more traditional

things. And like I said, I think it comes from being some kind of an old hippie mentality. I really wanted to work in the inner city. I volunteered to work at the school because I just, I just heard so many people that were putting down what was going on with those kids.

**And then when you were a student at Columbia and then ultimately a teacher, you must have found that that was an atmosphere more than most that accepted that philosophy or at least considered it.**

Oh, yeah.

**Yeah.**  
Oh, yeah, I was—it was great. I mean I put my—I put my—the first class I ever taught was a television production class. And I sat my kids in a circle, because that's what I was used to doing. And after, I think it was, maybe three or four weeks the assistant chair at the time came in to observe and he asked why they were in a circle and I told him. And he thought it was great. And I thought, good, I'm going to like this place. I may stay here beyond what's going to pay off my tuition. You know and Ed Morris he was—he always encouraged anything that—even some of the students came to complain about. Sometimes, you know, people are expecting more traditional methods. And he always supported anything I tried.

**Could you talk a little bit more then about, about that too, once you got here and were teaching? I don't know if there's a difference between part time and full time but what did you bring to the Television Department that maybe changed direction or —**

Yeah, sure. Barb Renowski was the one who got me my job here really, when I was a part-timer and she

was—she's the one that I think may be the first three of the full-timers in the department. And she still comes back three times year to teach a one Saturday—three Saturdays of semester class. She lives in Florida. She teaches a class called career strategies. She's an author and she was originally Ms. Barbara the science teacher on live television. I watched her as a student. I see her still on kinescope. I have some kinescope of her. And you know how in Chicago where you know like Romper Room or something?

**Right.**

She was the first of the live science teaching people on television and she was wonderful and, and she was just so full of, of just life and spirit. And she, she asked me—I was running a video production company while I was teaching in the Board of Ed.

**Yeah.**

It's a long story but she had seen one of the videos I had done. It was—I, I was working for the Board of Ed, putting together summer videos called—it was a summer drug free program where, where we draft kids in the summer time. I did this for three years. We drafted kids in the summer time, taught them how to use a video camera, and they made up videos against drugs. So, we went to 10 different schools in the City of Chicago.

We would do things in the park and the kids would come up with a rap song against drugs, or they would do a little mini documentaries about drugs and all that. And one of my drug videos ran on some show or I don't know how it is, but she saw it. And she said "could you come speak to one of my classes?" And I came in as a guest speaker.

And she said, "you've got to teach here full time because we really want to bring in this whole idea of television and diversity even though the school is, you know, a very diverse school."

And she's the one who really talked to Ed Morris about bringing me in. Now I was hired to teach television and I taught regular television classes like TV production and, and editing and things like that. But Ed knew that I came from an inner city environment and he knew that my big thrust was opportunities for students in television that were not necessarily traditional ways of working with them.

And when I came to him and said that I wanted to infuse more diversity subjects and into the classes and I wanted to do that, I even—and I told him I wanted to work on my documentary about mixed race people. He, he encouraged me so much. He actually found a place that was looking for speakers on mix raced subjects and it was this, it was—I have now for seven years presented it at this conference called the Core National Conference On Race and Ethnicity and Higher Education.

And it has about 5,000 people who work in—they don't work in television. They work in cultural studies across the country. And Ed found this booklet about it. And he said, "look into this." And I called him up and I sent them my documentary and I, and I presented a paper over there. And every year after that, I started coming back as a featured speaker. And back in—I'm very bad at years. Oh, man, I guess it was maybe eight or nine years ago now, the school got a Lilly Gant for Diversity Issues.

Avis Moeller, was the one who spearheaded this. And we had a couple million dollars Lilly Grant, and they wanted to put together a diversity team to send to Williams College who was a sponsor by the AACU. And they wanted to get six member teams from 20 colleges across the country that would sponsor a diversity initiative that would grow exponentially every year. And Avis Moeller and Christine Sommerville wrote something about our school that we were different because we are arts and communication and our teachers would be an unusual mix to bring in with traditional schools.

And we won. And so six of us went down there and I was one of the team. Avis Moeller and I and Glenn Graham and Gustavo Leone and some people who aren't here, again names escape me—she was in the Radio Department. But anyway, we went down and we had what was called a diversity boot camp. We spent a couple of weeks in classes actually—literally 16 hours a day from 8:00 in the morning until midnight. And we had to read about 50 books that summer and we had to learn different things about—across the board, from race to religions, sexual orientation, ethnic issues, women's issues.

And the job was to bring them back to the school and infuse this into the curriculum. And then when I became curriculum chair person and Avis was the moderator or, you know, she was the associate dean for that, we really began to put some of the diversity initiatives together. And I cared so much about it. And because it was my life already—because I had been working with that—I told Ed that I just was having a hard time continuing to teach television courses. I wanted to talk about diversity in the media.

And I, I created a course called culture, race and media. And it's really about media literacy and media influence and why people believed the way—you know, events—so many of our prejudices come from the media. And he gave me—he supported me every year in going to conferences. He paid for most of the kinds of training that I had asked to go to. He paid for I don't know how many, probably seven or eight different conferences that I went to as a learner.

And I started to go to two or three a year and then it developed into this social justice course that I teach. And so now I'm sort of an anomaly. I'm still in the Television Department but I only teach social science courses that are related to culture and race. And that's where my passion is. And so, I've been so lucky, and the whole department has, has supported it. I've been able to hire part time teachers who co-teach with me. Two of my full time people in my department, Tim Densmore and Sara Livingston, who are full timers are now co-teaching these courses with me so we can exponentially get them to have co-teachers.

So, I think the biggest change we had is that our department is really in the forefront of, of doing these kinds of things. Because unfortunately, school-wise, everyone in the administration hasn't felt that we needed this diversity initiative quite as much because we appear to be a very diverse school already. We have almost a 40% minority population. And my thesis basis has been that throwing in a mixed group of people doesn't necessarily mean that we're all talking and just, I have that conversation you could all be sitting in the same restaurant—

### **Right.**

—and not have the conversations or we could still have, you know, why are all the black kids sitting in the one part of the cafeteria book that's you know, so famous from Oprah's friend. And in our classes we discussed the difference between just throwing everybody together in the proverbial melting pot, which is crap and bull and the worst metaphor that anybody ever thought of in the world, or are we really working together and do we understand each other and are we adopting each other's ideas about (*inaudible*)?

Are we really infusing in our curriculum cultural modes from everyone or are we still just putting a lot of white patriarchal ideas about art and media out and hoping that the kids all sort of buy into it? I think we do both here. I just don't think that, I don't think that everyone that I have tried to talk to about this in the school at large has been supportive of the need. It, it looks like this. We have not had a lot of—we have a small administration as we all know. That's why we're going to through restructuring right now.

And so, we're very much about putting out fires. And because we haven't had racial clashes and riots on a large scale we appeared that we looked really healthy over here. And I'm not saying we aren't. It's a place I'd like to be because I love the mix. But, the TV Department has been really great as far as letting us having meetings and classes and things where we actually bring some of these issues to the front. And I recently had a five-year reunion of past students.

And so, I've taken the culture race and media courses and they're all over in the industry now. I mean, I

have a young lady out in New York who's working for ABC and I have, I have a young man who's work—he's just a cameraman on a truck at WLS. And people that are—all the stations and every station in Chicago, a whole bunch of CNN, and they came back to say that they shoot television differently. Yeah, and it's not because of what I said to them, it's because they have heard from each other and because they use so many media examples that we have. We have a lot of work to do, especially in the media classes about helping people to understand that we've been influenced by the media and we are going to be the new producers of it. And we better have a little bit more knowledge about media literacy.

**Before we leave this specific topic, when you talk about that appearance diversity and what your definition, it sounds like diversity isn't just that appearance or that percentage of that pie broken up. It's also understanding, from each group understanding each other group. What are some of the things that you'd like to see at Columbia and other departments? Or how would you like to change the minds of the people that, that think that that's enough, that if it says, you know, that 40% minority population and we're, you know, trying to keep that at or increase it, but that's not enough? What would you like to see happen beyond that?**

That's, that's an easy one because Avis Moeller and I worked a lot to try to continue what we got out of the diversity initiative from the Lilly Grant several years ago and that is, you can say to someone it's important that you have a couple of

courses on computer literacy and technology. And people will say, well maybe I'm not terrifically computer literate, but I know enough. But I'll take those courses because it'll be a good job.

It'll be good on my resume that I had extra—I know how to, I know how to work on dream weaver and put together a web page. That's cool. That's hip. That shows that you're looking for more knowledge. If you say to students, you know you really need to take a couple of courses in cultural diversity and understanding how you think about people who are different from you, people feel I don't need that. I'm not a racist. See, how I start my first class on the first day of each of my three classes each semester is, I teach cultural diversity classes because I'm a racist because we're all racists and sexists.

And if, if I could name the two or three people in the world I don't want to talk to it's people who tell me I don't see color because then you're missing 90% of who somebody is, or I don't, you know I'm—I don't see homosexuals, you know, they don't bother me or you know all those catch phrases that people use because they want to be politically correct. And students will think that a course like that is about political correctness, which it's not.

So we try to get the school to—on the curriculum committee, we try to push through a requirement that students would have to take across the board in any department, a requirement of a course that would have a cultural diversity attachment to it. You know like we have a W for writing intensive, have something that would say like culturally diverse and the courses would have to go through a clearing house to

show that they truly were courses that dealt with issues of understanding difference and understanding power.

And that's what we're really talking about. And we worked really hard at that, but because it's difficult to get requirements and we don't want to add more courses to students. This is where the answer that I talked about before came from, where people say we really don't have a problem here. And so, unless I believe, unless students are required to take a course that helps them to understand who they are and how they think. People don't voluntarily do this unless they have a lot of background about it.

When students come into the culture race and media class for example, the first few weeks it's all about denial. It's about, well no, you know, I—and how could you say you're a racist. And I say, we can't help it. We, we—culture is about our parents said, you know we eat this food and we do these things and this is when you're a good girl or boy if you do this. And if you go to this church and if you, you know—and probably your mom didn't ever say or the people who raised you, those people over there who eat that other food are bad or who go to that church are bad, but we do have—we have internal feelings that our way is right.

So it's not about discussing do I, do I accept or I hate the word tolerate other people, you know, tolerate is what you feel like I tolerate this cold until I can get rid of it. But it's about really celebrating that I am so glad I'm sitting in a classroom next to this artist person who has a whole different perspective about the news. So when we sit in a

circle and my seven or eight African-American students bring in news clippings and say you see the way this particular tease for Channel 5 said Chicago schools reading scores are down again.

And the background picture are African-American students, and none of the White students thought that was racist. It just happened to be the B-Roll, as we call it, that they put in. And all seven of the African-American students said, don't you see the subliminal subtle message that those are black kids who aren't reading, or you know things like that. Or commercials that will only show skinny beautiful girls and I'll have girls—I mean difference doesn't have to be the normal racial ethnic things. I mean, I have girls who say who brought—I have a girl who brought in 25 commercials and said find me somebody overweight. You know, and so we have subtle messages about what's okay. You have to be thin. You have to be blond. You have to be straight.

You have to be, you know, Wasp and, and I've had several Muslims in my class. I've had several—I've got two girls who are covered, and just to have someone who's covered explain how hard it is that the people in the Journalism Department say you'll never be able to get on the air unless you, you know, don't look like an Arab terrorist. And they come to me and tell me that.

And especially, when I hear from the students about part-timers who don't mean to say anything, but because most of our part-timers are excellent in their art or communications skills really haven't had methods courses or whatever you

call teaching courses nowadays, they inadvertently say a lot of things that students then in classes like ours are able to come to and, and talk about.

So, many of the students don't feel it's as welcoming a place when you get below the surface. And so, I really feel that we think that we need to have a core of courses that students can chose from that it becomes required. You will not—very few students, unless they hear from world of mouth, you know, like for my class they get filled at early registration, because I get a lot of support from the Journalism and, and Marketing Department, other departments who know the kids have come up and talked about it and said wow, I—now I know I'm a sexist or whatever, too. But it needs to be required. You can see, I'm very passionate about it, because I'm talking so long about it, because I really have a passion about it.

**No, absolutely. Maybe we can parley this into if you could talk a bit about how you describe the mission of the college and how that relates—how it relates to, to your philosophy or teaching philosophy and the values that you, you know, carry through to the classroom?**

Well obviously, even though I've been sounding critical when I say that the school didn't see to agree that we need a cultural diversity requirement, I'm here because I think it's the best place to possibly teach in the City of Chicago. At least because of the mission, because of our open enrollment, because we are very accepting of students, because we try to work especially in the last couple of years

in helping these students with composite tests and everything. Early intervention to help them to feel like they can make it through college and we really have a lot of work to do as far as keeping—the retention effort needs to be brought up certainly.

So, I think everybody's heart is in the right place about trying to work with getting the school to be truly accepting and, also not just accepting in the beginning, but helping you to succeed so you get out of here. So, you know the whole, you know, it gets to be a half (*inaudible*) phrase by now, of a culture of their times and everything like that.

#### **Right.**

It's important, and so I believe, that the best thing about Columbia College is that we give students a place where they can have an individual voice. I love seeing the, the look of Columbia College, the way students are dressed or in trying so hard at that age to be individuals and, and what else they're doing to do that. I love to hear elevator conversations when they're very passionate. I think anything with passion is the, the kids can get anything from me if they say it with passion. So, I love the idea that this is a place where you don't have to fit a mold in a lot of ways. But, we still have work to do and I think, I think years ago, when the faculty was younger and when we weren't quite as I guess corporate, it really reflected that mission.

And, now I think, we have to work very hard especially as a lot of us are getting older, not me, but the rest of the faculty, I have to work really hard at embracing change, embracing a lot of new things that are going on because we need to

keep listening to the students more. And, we have to be very careful when we come to corporate.

**Relating to that, do you worry about as Columbia grows and becomes more popular and known that that's going to impact negatively the diversity? Is that going to be harder to maintain that diversity?**

I don't think the growing is going to do it. I think we have to be careful that teachers don't—I think we have to be careful what we think of as success. Does success mean that we now have X number of students that were larger in that way to success? You don't mean that we're attracting the quotes of right students? I'm a little worried about some of the BFA's and things that there will now be requirements to get into the school. Who do, who do we keep out? I'm against it. I'm against (*inaudible*), because I think it's happening a little bit here. But, it's not an inevitable that's going to hurt our diversity.

I just—I think what's going to—what's, what's our biggest—the thing we have to be most careful about is this wishing things were the way they used to be. I'm not saying that I'm—I don't even—I don't—it doesn't matter whether I agree or don't agree with the restructuring going on in the new four schools and the new present—it doesn't matter. But what matters to me a lot are hearing elevator conversations again about the good old days when Alexandroff was here. Because those good old days were, were okay for them.

But let's, let's bring on the change now. Let's stop being afraid of change. I mean, I just think we have to be very careful about not

getting old and stodgy in our thinking. And for, everyone of the people that I heard complaining about these changes, I want to say, are you complaining because you're just becoming old and afraid of change? Change has got—I mean, we've got to change. We, we—it's just the nature of something that's alive and dynamic. And, we are not the school of 70s and we don't make decisions based on two or three people.

I think it's very—I think we need to bring—I'm happy we're going to bring a pro (*inaudible*) from the outside. I think we need to be bringing in a lot more outside people. I think we should be very careful that we, we work on bringing a diversity in—that we're not the little incestuous school that everybody loves so much. We're different. We've got to change every year. That's what it's about. Just like you can't teach like you used to teach.

If you're teaching the same class you taught 10 years ago, I think you should leave Columbia College. That was too, that was too—oh, after that you would say I shouldn't do that. I'll get that thrown in my face. No, I should—I just really—I'm sorry, I just, I just feel like changing—you know, change is just something that I'm always asking myself when I hear people complaining about changes—are you just afraid that you are—you like, to stay in your comfort zone.

You know one of the things again, I say in my, in my class, "why you're going to be upset in this, in this social change class, is because we have levels when we're learning something, and if you're in a comfort zone you're not learning.

You're learning, when you learn on a learning edge. And so if you're, if you're at a learning edge, you're, you're anxious. You're um, you're defensive. You're a lot of—you're nervous. And when you get the person in the right place that's on the learning edge, then you're able to get honest." Then you will say yeah, maybe I pretended that I'm liberal, but you know it's okay if Michael Jordan moves next to me, but not that streetwise guy.

And you know, you begin to ask yourself those questions. And I think the same thing goes on with teachers here. Are you against this new restructuring, because you're just so used to being in your comfort zone? It's scary to me too. It should be scary to us, but scary should be good. Giving up authority in a classroom is always scary.

I'm tense for three hours sitting in that circle because I don't know who's in charge from moment to moment sometimes. But that dynamic is also so exciting for, for learning. And I wouldn't go back to wanting to stand in front of the group of kids and lecture even though I—it's a lot easier, because you know what's going to happen. You pretty much know what's going to happen.

**Just very quickly, when you just brought for that image of being in a class for three hours and not necessarily knowing who's leading it or who's going to step up. Do you, do you not step in? Do you wait to see who's going to come out—I mean as the instructor or the teacher at the head of the class supposedly, do you wait and let that happen or do you jump in?**

Oh, no. Let me put it like this. I'm always responsible for what's going on for that whole three hours. And

I always know in my heart of hearts, that I have to be in control and that it's just, and it's just giving a lot of—it's, it's setting the class up very early in the first moments of the class, setting the class up so that they begin to have a shared responsibility where even though I'm in control, someone else may be the one that's acting in control.

I'll give you and example. Like, I'm really—I'm very strict on time. You have to be on time. You can't miss classes because they're community. It's about community. So, if you're going to miss a class I don't want a phone call. I want you to call three or four people in the class, explain why you're missing it, and ask how you can speak with them after the class to get the work. It's a community. If you're not there, you are hurting 19 other peoples' learning for that day.

If there's going to be an argument between a couple people who are monopolizing the class, I can stand up and, and say this is not productive behavior, or because I give them three or four peer remediation techniques in class one, somebody will shout out inevitably fishbowl, which means that four chairs go into the center of the circle and the only people who could talk are the people in the center. And then we do a mediation. So, if somebody doesn't say fishbowl or somebody doesn't say this person's monopolizing my community situation over here, then of course, I'm going to step in. And I have to step in at the beginning. It's a learning process.

**Yeah.**

I, I don't feel I, I never lose control of the responsibility of the class, but it's a class about community. And so some people don't like that

class. They don't like that. I know students, I get one semester who will say—usually it'll be something that goes to the chairs. I said about my chair being very supportive. I'm paying my money to learn and Beau is saying to me that if five people are late, we can't start the community until they get there.

And so, why should I wait for these people because I'm paying my money? And I'm saying you're not understanding community and so I'm expecting that if this person's continually late you're going to call her up and say, I can't have a community without you. And so this is a very different concept for some students—that they're in charge. They're responsible for getting the people who haven't learned the rules, to learn the rules by them—by any means necessary and not oppose me.

And so I mean, I mean I—we go—every person has a different personality, or aspects of a different personality. Sometimes, I begin to take charge more if they're not a group that understands this level of community. But, but very seldom have I not had where the people who are the, the leaders, who will be the future leaders step up and decide how it's going to happen. But it's not that happens—it's, it's not at all an unplanned amorphous body there. I mean these are—they just are sort of—this is too strong a word.

They're almost manipulated into learning how to run the class. I'm, I'm behind them. And that's why I said, I'm, I am, I am tense in a very covered way for the whole three hours. I never relax. I never think that I'm not in charge. I just don't show it. And that's the—I think that's the, that's the greatest differ-

ence between how I taught 15 years ago. Because I think when you're a new teacher and you're a young teacher, you have to prove you're in charge.

And I think the less you can show you're in charge, you'll be in charge underneath. I, I feel very confident that, that I'm really good at doing that. And I, I enjoy it. As a matter of fact. I enjoy when in the past years I did in-services with part time fac—do you think it's important to learn, I, I mean and I'll get better next year. I'll you know—

**Yeah.**

—or we'll keep on getting better. It's a group thing. But, I think that's why, I mean, I'm very—I probably am more proud of my teacher of the year award that I got in the year that I got it, because those were the days when the students would nominate. I'm not saying it's not good if you self-nominate like you do now.

**Right.**

But the students mostly in, in their nominations it had to do with the part that they felt they, they were in charge and they liked that feeling. And that's, that's probably my biggest, what I'm very proud of to the point of probably being arrogant.

**Do you remember what year that was?**

Sure, it was '97, yeah.

**I want to stick with this one more time and maybe talk about the in-service because that seems important. How difficult is it to—now you've illustrated an example of, of what you do in the classroom. How difficult is it to—and you said there's some resistance at times between students**

**more or less or whatever. How does it—is it to present that and yet teachers to embrace that?**

Well, I guess in all fairness I don't know if this—I would like to spend time doing this with more teachers, but I was called upon to do diversity work with the teachers. I wasn't called upon to—

**Oh, okay.**

—teach them how to do this necessarily. So, in the in-services of the training sessions that I have done here, there about a diversity. But I—the title of my main, um, workshop that I do and I do these workshops probably 10 times a year with different school districts. And I—the title says it all. It's not about me. And I think that the difference between a beginning teacher and someone who really loves teaching is getting themselves out of the picture.

It doesn't sound like it because I'm using a lot of I's, as I talk to you now. But it's not about—it's not about showing off that you know the material. It's not about showing off that I'm in charge of the class and I am the font of all knowledge and I am here to save you. If you, if you are thinking about yourself, then you're not getting to where the students are. The important thing is where is, where is that young lady in the class right now.

Where is her, where is her focus and how can you bring that focus back to the class? How can you get students to care about each other as community? And I think that the diversity and the act of learning approaches go hand in hand because that's—I don't, I don't know that. I haven't had any resistance because I didn't spend very much time on that part. I spend more of my time trying to get there. And see, because that goes

together. You could teach anybody if you're about yourself.

But if you're going to really pay attention to each student, then you'll have different kinds of reactions. If you understand that, that the young Korean student, international student in your class is not going to speak up because you understand enough about that culture's relationship to a teacher you'll know when to call on him or her or not. Then you'll—I mean you need to—teachers need some basic training in cultural models and, and codes and things like that. And once you learn that, then by opening the class up this way, you can incorporate all of that together at different times.

I mean there's some students—you know so we—the student again—I'm back to my diversity. The student that's raising her hands is not one that's paying more attention than the student who never speaks out. That's why you have to give them paired assignments of, you know, writing things. I mean that's why you have to have all those different methods, because it's not about you.

It's about what—how can each one of these and I'm lucky enough, because I only have a top of 20 in my class—is how do each of these 20 take in information. You're always looking at that. And so if, if a student of a different culture to get the point across to some—form their culture that is I can, why should I be the one teaching it? We will all read the same articles and then let's take turns on trying to best get everybody else to come on board and understand that there's a level that we're understanding it. It just seems to make so much more sense.

**If I could ask you a personal question before we started to interview you, you mentioned that you were married to an African-American. Your children are biracial. Would you encourage—or how would you feel about your children saying I want to go to Columbia and also how has maybe your own personal experience led you, you know, to your interest in that if it has, if it has? I guess by the question I'm assuming it has.**

My husband is French-Creole, which means he's a mixed race person.

**Okay.**

But in our society you're not allowed.

**So he—would he refer to himself as African-American?**

He refers to himself as African-American. He was hired as a minority person on his job because you can't be in between. But that was many years ago. I never check a race box. I refuse to check a race box. Race is a social construct. It's about power. It's not real. It's silly. My son doesn't check a race box. My son will not tell you he's Black.

My son will not tell you he's White because it's—I mean, I have a whole philosophy that would be three hours on that. But it doesn't mean, you know, notice race but we—I'm, I'm so against labeling that it's, it's just awful. As a matter of fact right now in our department one of the minors were trying to push through is a minor in media activism. And I guess what it boils down to is if there was some way that we could get more people to become activists about celebrations and acceptance of who they are and this is not popular with everybody. But I mean like Zora Neal Hurston, was one of my idols and

you know when she says, "I see no reason to be proud to be Black."

And I don't see any reason why everybody's proud to be White, you know, I'm proud for the writer than I am. And I'm proud—and, and I mean that's again there's very many Afro-Centric organizations that are against this. And so I go against the grain with that. I'm here at Columbia College because, because I like the philosophy and everything else. Like my son didn't show—didn't chose to come here because his interest was in engineering and he went to, he went to Champaign.

But he would come here if he was interested in the arts. He likes the philosophy of the school very much. My husband and I both sort of feel, that how you live your life is—I can't ever talk about—how can I talk about teaching if I didn't, if I didn't—I, I couldn't teach teachers how to teach in a circle if I stood up in front of the class and was lecturing, lecturing person. And I know that my, my liberalism I guess that, that had me marry someone over 20 years ago when it was very unpopular.

Sure that brought me to the place. Of course they're connected. I mean that, that's who I am. My husband has taught me more about what it feels like to have people be racist and—I mean I—then my degrees and my books—I'm a Ph.D. candidate in cultural studies and, and I, I love reading books and hearing professors who will speak about things. But you know, I know how it feels because we've experienced it on a daily basis.

We've been refused, you know, motel rooms together. We've been, we've been—people have—a lot of,

a lot of people have been very cruel to us, because of that. I mean, I've had Black women who have come up to me and, and cursed at me, saying I've stolen one of the last of the good ones. I mean there's silly things that could go on that way, sure. You know so I know I can't—I don't pretend to be a sister. I don't pretend to understand what it feels like to be Black.

But, I know what it feels like to be hurt, and all of us do on some level. I, I tell my students that I understand about a lot of things being a blue-collared person. I have four college degrees but I'll always feel like a working class person because that's where I come from. And that's what we need to do. We need to understand our identities. And so I think, we don't have to be out there activists. We need to understand who we are to work here, to be here.

**Where did that come from? Did it come from your, your—I hate to use the word substantivity, it's been overused, but where did your understanding of wanting to understand outside of your own experience or comfort level? Did it come from the—when you first taught at Hirsh or did it come earlier or did it—do you know what I'm saying?**

No, it had to come earlier than Hirsh because I, I asked to be placed in our inner city schools.

**Right. So when you're, like and I, I can take this to my last semester I had a Korean student and it took me a long time, and it came from him, him talking about an interview he did with a Korean war veteran, and that the Korean war veteran wanted the student to use the formal term. And the Korean student was taken aback**

**by that. He thought he could use the familiar in the interview. So I kind of clued into because and the student's work was just so really you could tell—his work displayed a greater interest and enthusiasm about the course than his contribution verbal. So where did that come from—of your understanding of the need to understand those kinds of differences and that that could help community, that could help a teacher-student relationship, all the things that you've touched on today?**

I don't know. That's pretty funny. I go back, I go back to—I think I go back to the blue-collar background that I have again. I have two parents, who not only didn't graduate—well my father's deceased. But, not only didn't graduate from high school—from college, they didn't graduate from high school. And I think, that being a voracious reader and wanting to be a teacher or something at a very young age, I, I think I sometimes just felt that I wasn't a part of the people around me.

I think I was just kind of a kid who didn't feel like I belonged where I was, where I was. And I live in Pilsen. I live in a very mixed neighborhood. My friends were very mixed, because it was more about poverty and class than it was about race. And so, um, as I said I, I don't believe people who say they don't see color. But when, when you're a kid it doesn't matter, everybody is your friend and all of that. I was just—I mostly went with—I think I felt color and ethnicity wasn't important. Just, we all had to be sort of like from working-class poor people together.

And my, my prejudice at the time because I was growing up with rich people, people who lived in Winnetka. Yeah, the idea. And, I was really surprised when my parents were against my marriage too, and they were. And they forbade it. So you know, I mean, then I realized how people could have different ideas about things. And yeah I, I got married before I taught in the inner city.

So my husband, I guess, would be understanding of my thinking about things, I guess. I guess being hurt helps you to maybe feel like you don't want other kids to get hurt the way you were. But yeah, the same way that it hurts. They said that people who think that they don't need counseling, need it most. You know heal myself and all of that, yeah.

**With your parents were you because of the way you were raised and the values that you grew up with, you assumed that they would be open to this?**

Yeah, my parents didn't teach, didn't teach racism. But they didn't accept it for their own daughter.

*(Inaudible).*

Yeah, one of the, one of the funny conferences on that—and I use it in my class is the biggest barometer. And you kind of draw this long line and you know put—about like, you know, you know—other people of other races are okay, or you know I don't like the, like your Ku Klux Klan at one end and then you'll—but it's okay if they—

**Michael Jordan.**

—City, you know, if they marry my daughter, if my child is of another race.

**Yeah.**

And you know, so I'm the biggest barometer. I didn't realize where they were, you know. And at that's the way it came out, yeah. That's sort of where it came out. And then again I mean, I mean I had a lot of racism. In a school of 2400 African-American students the majority of teachers were, were Black. I think there may be 10 of us White teachers at some time. And, and we were prejudiced against.

And a lot of people felt, that a White teacher shouldn't be teaching, you know, cultural studies with African-Americans. How could you know anything about that? And so, like I said, "I don't pretend I'm a sister, but you know I did learn what I did over there and we won, we won national documentaries about racial issues because"—see because again I didn't have to be the voice of it. All you do is—you have to learn how to be the, the one who directs other—the other voices and then you don't have to be the authority. So I feel, I think if I had to be really honest I feel the least comfortable in all White situations because it's sort of been where I've been. So yeah, I would, I would not be very comfortable teaching in some place that didn't look like this.

**I want to thank you very much for a very interesting interview.**

**We're coming to the end. Do you have anything that we didn't touch on that we could end with?**

Well of course I want to give. Because this is 2001 and it hasn't materialized yet, I will be passionately imploring everyone that I

come in contact, especially administrators the next couple of years that the Center for Cultural Racism in Media, that I have been writing proposal after proposal after proposal for the last several years, comes to fruition. I think we need to have a place here at Columbia because we are a media school.

Where students can get a minor and get a place where they could learn about media literacy and the influences of the media on their, on their ideas about race representation, gender, things like that. The classes are nice, but a small number of students go there and I've been working on the Center for Culture Racism for several years. I'm working on a—we're working on a department—on a minor in media activism. And I think that if we're going to be one of the premier media schools, we need to have a component where students learn about media literacy.

That's not the sexiest charm where they get to learn about the influence and there are just hundreds and hundreds of sources that will tell you that we get more of our ideas about who we are racially, ethnically, sexual orientation class, family values from the media than we do from church or parents now because that television is on 7.5 hours a day at least in every home. And if we don't begin to really value that here at Columbia, we'll be teaching too much about technology and not enough about critical thinking. So that's what I really—I'm working on it and some people are listening, and I'm continuing to work on it.

**Are there other centers similar to that elsewhere?**

Yeah.

**There are?**

There are. Well my, my favorite one is at NYU. They have a major that's called Media Ecology. And it's the ecology because it's, you know, it's pervasive. It's the atmosphere, and what we're doing, we're polluting our planet and we're polluting our, our minds of our people through that. And so yes, and, and UC Davis. You know all over the country there are, there are versions of this. There's none here in Chicago area and I just think that—

**Yeah.**

—it belongs here. So that's what my big portion is.

**And are you hopeful?**

Yes. It's going to happen. It may not happen under my watch but that's okay. It doesn't have to be the cultural diversity center, but I know I'm pushing enough people to do it. Yeah, I think it's really important. I am hopeful. I'm—more than that, I'm passionate. I mean if you have passion, it's going to happen. That's what I—that's my one, that's my one mantra out of life. If you have passion, it's going to happen and I can't be more passionate than this, you know.

**Okay, great. Thank you very much.**