

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT BROWN

B: Bonnie  
T: Thelma  
R: Robert Brown

T: We are going to interview professor Brown. He is a psychology teacher at Hope College. We are at his office. The interviewers are Bonnie Lee and Thelma Collado. This is February, 1, 1977.

B: Is it on? O.k., first we will ask you what is your name?

R: Robert Brown.

B: And how long have you been teaching at Hope College?

R: 16 years.

T: How long have you been a psychologist? Teacher...

R: Well...Here you mean?

T: No...when you started.

R: Well...I suppose I started in the psychology... with my master degree...when I was teaching high school in Grand Rapids and a ...was working part in a counseling office. I became interested in human behavior. My undergraduate training was a history and as a spanish teacher and I ended up of course teaching history and english. Then I moved on...for about 10 years I was in public education in high school. I taught in the junior high one time. But back to your question. While I was working in my masters degree while teaching...I became interested in human behavior. And um...this was in Ann Arbor, in western, Michigan, and then gradually found myself sliding more and more...into the interest area of human dynamics and personality and things like that. And then um...I stayed right with that and went on to my doctorate at Michigan State. I finished that up after I had been here at Hope for I think about...oh 2 years. I had most of it done when I came to Hope in a...1960. And um...then I finished my degree in 62.

T: Your doctorate degree?

R: Right, then I've been psychology...I came to Hope in the department of psychology. Teaching child psychology and intro. and...

B: Do you enjoy teaching it?

R: Oh, yes, very much, yes indeed. I've always liked this place.

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We've had chances to go else where, but I think what I liked about Hope College was, or has been the...quality of the student and the size of the school and the department...particularly the psychology department because its...its uh maintained diversification. We all have our own areas of speciality. We're not all cut out of the same cloth...so to speak. We're not all behaviorists, you know, we're not all hard core experimentalists. But we represent all of these, you know. And that's good I think. From the stand point of working in a department like that and also I think from the stand point of the departments development you know, and of offerance to the student.

T: Have you worked besides teaching...have you worked in an institution?

R: No, uh I...no I'm not employed elsewhere. I have from time to time been contracted, so to speak, for short periods of consultation with programs. In the state, I'm a licensed psychologist for the state of Michigan and being that has given me an opportunity to supervise other psychologists who are seeking credentials such as this...and from time to time people will call and consult with me on primarily the uh behavioral difficulties. I can see some people on a very limited basis, occasionally. Students use me this way also, quite frequently during the year. I would say that I probably see about 20 to 25 students in some form of therapy...every year.

B: Are these students that you know very well?

R: No, they are just students that are aware that...I'll fit them into my schedule if it's available for them..And that if they're seeking help in difficulties with emotional problems or, they'll be referred to me by some other student who, knows that this help is here if they want it.

B: What type of problems do they have? Just you know, family problems or...?

R: Oh... I don't know. It's uh...cuts across the whole galant of identity crisis...some are tied up with long standing family difficulties that they are trying to resolve themselves here... male-female relationships, not to be motivated so to speak... to loose motivation, despondacy. Quite frequently if I were to classify them, many of them are in the state of some form of... over reaction to a crisis or kind of depressive reaction to a crisis that they are dealing with. And...that's about it.

T: Are these good students?

R: Oh, yes indeed. Several of them are, you know,...I'm working with three students right now...I see them once a week now, for the last three weeks. Two of them have a gpa. of about 3.4, one has a g.p.a. of 3.2 and ...yes, indeed, in facts sometimes it's

things. So very often, I give the client, homework...and they must go outside, perform certain things, do certain things, even in some cases, keep a log of their feelings for the week, bring it back and then work on this.

T: Is it easier as a psychologist to work with young people, or an older person, or children?

R: Well, myself, I don't work with kids. I like the young adult. The person oh 20 to 29 or 30. And...I work very well with depression, I am very good there. I know what I can do...and I know what I do works.in that area. But...this is another thing, you come to an awareness of what you can do and you do that. Try to get into the whole ball game. Although being aware of where all these little variables fit into the person is the problem. One has to be aware of that. This is my own preference, I have experience there.

B: Where were you born?

R: Well, I was born in a small town south of here, S. Joe, Mich., on a coast guard station. I lived there with my grandfather mostly. My father was in the navy most of my life...and then we moved to...oh heavens, we moved to north of Virginia, his ship was down there and Sandiago, California, was moved around quite a bit.

B: Was it hard for you to make the adjustments of moving around?

R: I don't think so, I think I has a good solid base from my grandfather, who was my sociolical father...he taught me an awful lot. Good christian man, hard working person, and.. he himself was born and raised in Norway. And so he ran away ...he didn't run away he started on a vessel out of Oslo, Norway when he was 14...and I guess he was around the world in his travels before he was 20, six times on a sailing ship.

T: Oh, that is beautiful!!

R: So, he came out of that kind of background you see. This was very adventurous for me, the tales he would tell. I spoke Norwegian until I was 16.

B: Do you remember any of it?

R: Oh, a little bit...I can understand it fairly well when I hear it. My wife and I went to Norway a year or so ago...during my sabbatical and ...it was very wild. I could pick up words that were coming to me out of my childhood. But I couldn't get my tongue to work,(we all laugh), to well.

B: I went there two years ago.

R: Oh did you? Where?

B: I was a foreign exchange student. I went to Kristiansand, Norway.

R: Oh, very good!!

B: I liked it very much. I stayed there with a family for two months.

R: Exciting!!

B: I didn't pick up the language very well!!

R: It's pretty hard.

B: Yes, it's pretty hard, they talk too fast!!

R: Yes, they do!! And the Swedes, we were in Stockholm for a while, and then to Oslo...and then to Bergen and spent a week or two in Sange fiord. This is a large fiord north of Bergen. Then we came back to Bergen...and back to Germany. My wife is from Germany. So we had to visit what relatives lived there. And that was exciting.

B: How did you like Norwegian food?

R: Excellent! I was raised on it.

B: Oh, I thought it was good too. Did you have whale?

R: Uh, no whale, no.

B: Well, we had it, yech!! (we all laugh)

R: No, alot of cod and alot of macheral and all kinds of goodies. But, I was used to it. Alot of fish.

B: That is all we ate. The pastries were good.

R: Yes the pastries were very good.

B: How long have you been married?

R: Oh boy, lets see...I have to get this one right....(everyone laughs), in May...it will be 32 years!

B: Wow!!

B: Do you have any children?

R: Yes, I have three. Laura of course, our oldest daughter is married and has four children now. She just remarried...she has two of her own from a previous marriage and acquired two more in her second marriage. So, she has four children now. And...Jeff is our next, he is 23..24 and he just entered the

airforce last week. So he's down at Alacklon airforce base. Randy is 20 and he is living in his own little tar paper shack, out here on 32 some place, and working in a gas station. Went to Hope for two years and then decided to wing it on his own for a while and maybe come back. But he's been gone about a year now. Kind of exploring himself a little bit.

B: When you were raising the kids, did you raise them on a ...I don't know...somewhat of a psychology basis?

R: I suppose some of the things slipped into that. There are no professional parents. We're all amateurs really. We learn parent by being parented. And so I guess occasionally I was avoiding some of the things that I didn't want our kids to experience that I had experienced, for intence such as absence of a father in a family. My mother was ill most of my life, and...fortunately I had a very healthy wife, so, she was involved.  
 8 We both worked all during the times the kids were coming up in age. And we thought that was a fairly good thing to see that you know, husband and wife, mother and father both contributed to the family. Without trying to neglect the kids. But no I ...I think I was a parent first, husband second, and maybe a psychologist third, you know, when it came to the kids. And ...I suppose everyone would say, "Well, if I had to do it over again", (Everyone laughs), Well, I guess it worked out o.k. I'm not in prison or jail or anything. They're good kids most of them.

B: Did you ever want your kids to go into what you're teaching now?

R: No, I had no desire for that. Quite the contrary, I think we both geared ourselves, Ruth and myself, to the fact that we wanted to hopefully allow the kids to go in their own direction as much as possible...I am of the belief that the parents influence over the kid in the family really ends at about 15. I think that by that time, you've given them everything that you can give and reacted to everything that you react to. After that you're not going to really change anything and so...we did everything we could to be a part of their world. But I didn't want them to be what I was, or be what my wife is. And interesting enough, it's that way. Laura has always been interested in medicine. She works in the hospital here, in the lab and...Jeff has been searching for himself through his music and his art. He is a tremendous jazz musician. He just couldn't quite feel that now would be the time to break out on his own, he didn't have enough money for it, and I couldn't afford it. So, he decided about two months ago, I'm going to go in the air force and stash away some money. In four years and I'll try and make my break in music. And...as I said Randy ... I don't know, where he'll end up. He's got kind of a business head on him and independant. He's the mose independent of the 3.

T: Have your kids sometimes asked you for advice of a psychology

matter?

R: Oh, yes as they got older they did this. And that's the hardest thing to do because you're so close to them. It's very hard to be objective when you're subjectively wound up with your immediate family. So, it was like you said, advice, and or some suggestions. Sometimes they took it and sometimes they would do something else. (everyone laughs)

B: Did your relatives ever ask you for advice?

R: Oh yeah, once in a while, it has occurred. You see the role that you have as a psychologist is often very clumsy. People will ...well I'll go to a party and they'll introduce me to someone who is new in the neighborhood, someone who they want me to meet, and...oh I say yes, I'm Robert Brown and they say this is Dr. Brown the psychologist. Immediately some of these people get the feeling that they are sitting there underware!!(we all laugh) You know, I'm analyzing everything that they're saying. I'm not that kind of a person, I don't want that role. So, when I can...I try and switch it on and off as much as possible when I'm with people. And...we don't have all of the answers by a long shot.

B: Have you ever had any embarrassing or funny situations in teaching classes?

R: Well, we like to think that there is some humor in the class most of the time. Embarrassing situations, I don't know. I can't recall any. I'm sure there are some. Well there is obviously one, most people, males in teaching, had that experience at one time. I had that experience walking into class with my fly unzipped. (we all laugh) Teaching the whole hour with my fly unzipped. Only to be told at the end of the hour by a male student that it was open. (we all laugh!)

B: That would be funny!!

R: Yes, it was!!!

B: I like our class second hour, our test is tomorrow.

R: Yeah right. You'll do all right on that. I think you get a style for the test now. That's the main thing getting the flavor of the first test and how the questions will be asked. The rest of them will all be the same kind of test. We start getting into some meaty stuff too. More of the behavioral stuff.

T: I liked it too, but I didn't do very well.

R: Well you had trouble with that course for a while. You passed it didn't you?

T: Yes I passed it, D very bad.

R: It was reading though.

T: Yes, because of my english.

R: Well I wish I could remember my Spanish. But, I haven't used it in so long. I can still read a little of it...but I wish I could have kept it up. Because I have so many chances, encountered so many Spanish speaking people. I went to a school where there were no people who spoke the language. Then I came to this school and we've had a gradual development in the area of Spanish speaking people. I wish I had still hung on to it. But, I'm too old to rehearse now.

B: What would you like to do after you retire?

R: Oh boy, I don't know!! I think...you can see in here (points to the pictures of boats on the wall), that I'm a sailor. And ...have been all my life. This is our boat which we cruise on Lake Michigan with. My wife is an avid sailor and the best crew. So she and myself take this boat all over the lake in the summertime. Sail to Beaver islands, Harbor Bay and places like that. Ideally I suppose I'd like to retire...sell everything take this boat or sell it. And then buy another boat in the Caribbean some place. Just bum around on a sail boat.

B: That sounds great!!

R: That would be an ideal situation.

B: Would you ever go back to Norway?

R: Well, just to visit again I think. I don't think that I would retire in a foreign country. I think as long as I have my physical strength and my wife has hers, we can travel. I suppose she'd like to do that. One thing we've talked about in the last 5 years very strongly...and that is to sell the house and move into an apartment, change our living style. The house is just too much for two people. Move into an apartment and try to live there. And do some reading or some writing that we want to do. I'm looking forward to it. Of course you may not know I am a clock maker and a collector. I have about 120 clocks in my collection. I repair them and tinker with them and get them running again. I thought that perhaps part of retirement might be spent again, as my going back to my little shop in the basement...and working on clocks.

B: How did you get interested in that?

R: Oh very weird, very bazaar!! My wife has been an antique bug for a long time, collects dolls and owls. All kinds of owls and about, oh I guess...12 to 13 years ago...yes it's been at least that. We were down in Sagatuck, and she was looking in an antique shop down there. I was wondering around outside and I looked in this big rain barrel and there was something shiny down in the

- R: No, I don't think that it's innate. I don't know where the origins are, I think it comes out of experience. Being taught well maybe, having a good student teacher relationship. Also many things I think enter into it...and then of course, gather the educational background for the subject that you want to teach. Today in psychology...oh heavens...it's such a market. There is such a strong amount of people who want to go into college teaching of psychology for instance. Because this is the good life. College teaching in any area...I think any area is a good life as long as one pursues it as such. You're not making all the money in the world, but it's an exciting life. I think what I have admired most in the last 12-15 years of something in my own teaching experience here anyway, has been that dealing with young minds has kept me young. I'm not banging heads with 52 year old guys all day long you see. But it keeps me young, it keeps me feeling young anyway. I know I'm getting old but it keeps me feeling young.
- B: What do you think of the open class system that they have now, such as at the West Ottawa middle school?
- R: Yes, I haven't kept up with the techniques of public education to know what works and what doesn't work. There is experimentation going on in the classroom climate with a variable learning. I still think that the best indication of a classroom experience is the learning that goes on, not the teaching. As far as I'm concerned I think the most important thing that goes on in the classroom is learning. The teaching technique facilitates that learning and it has facilitated it, it shows under research that it has facilitated it, good. But...this kind of experimentation has to go on, you know, to find that kind of method that best induces learning and this is what happened here. I would like to see the comparative production of the student as they move from system to another. Regarding you know, the learning variable.
- T: You talked about the Spanish people at this area and...Do you think bilingual education is good?
- R: Oh yes I do.
- T: I asked you that because I think lets say the teacher is supposed to say exactly the same in both languages. Would the kid get more about the language he likes? Then he will the other?
- R: Oh I see what you mean if the teacher gave a lesson in Spanish and a lesson in English. Both together...oh I don't know...I think you're right there. I thought you meant growing up bilingually.
- T: No, I mean in the class.
- R: Well, there are more English speaking people around than Spanish. The person is going to have to live in an English speaking en-

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viornment. Perhaps in this case, what you're saying...having an understanding on the part of the teacher. But not to teach it simultaneously.

T: Yes, they are...this is a new program that they are making, in kindergarten, first, and second grade...they are doing this.

R: I don't know anything about that. I think that human behavior might be such. But here we are dealing with little kids... they are very pliable. It would be tougher for a person our age to get to go in a bilingual experience and not fall back on our own language, you know. But maybe if we get them young enough it will be just like turning a switch. Then there may not be any confusion... I don't know. But I think that there are real advantages for growing up with another language. Whether it's taught at school or not.

T: I don't want my kids to lose their language.

R: Sure!! Don't you dare!! This is one of the reasons that I learned the language that I did. Because my grandfather insisted on speaking it and so did my grandmother. But I got around my uncles and they wouldn't speak it. When I came in the room it was always English. That's what I mean...I think that it's good training for a person.

T: Well I speak to him and in both of the languages.

R: That's good.

T: That's why I asked you about the school, because they are trying to teach him what he doesn't understand in Spanish.

R: Does he seem confused then?

T: Well when we first came here, he didn't know any English at all and so it was very hard for him at the beginning but now I think if they had a little patience and explained it in English, he'd understand it better.

R: Well I don't know how to answer that Thelma. I can that it's an unique situation. You're closer to the child than the teacher. If you sensed any confusion on the part of the child in the bilingual treatment...I'd certainly let the teacher know that... Let the teacher know that you have that opinion about them.

T: Yes I told them already. But my English isn't very good to teach them you know.

R: Oh your English is good!

B: Yes, your English is good!!

T: I usually use "you" and "why" and that was one of the things that the teacher told me that my son got.

R: Well is there anything else? Has this been of some help?

T: Oh yes!!

T: You know that we are trying to make a magazine?

R: This is what I understand...you're putting it altogether. Other people are interviewing other people, right?

B: Oh yes!!

B: We had a list of people to interview and we picked you because she had you for class and so do I. We both liked you so...

T: Maybe we will come back again if we forgot something.

R: Oh sure!

T: See you, thanks alot!!