

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History Of United Schools

Personal Experience

O.H. 1102

DEAN NICHOLSON

Interviewed

by

John Gecina

on

March 18, 1981

DEAN NICHOLSON

Dean Nicholson was born on January 20, 1936, the son of Robert and Esther Nicholson, in Columbiana, Ohio. He attended Lisbon High School where in 1954 he graduated. Dean spent four years in the Marine Corps and then proceeded to further his education at Mount Union College. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1966 and then received his master's degree in 1973 at Westminster College.

Dean Nicholson is currently the head of the OWE program at United High School.

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INTERVIEWEE: DEAN NICHOLSON
INTERVIEWER: John Gecina
SUBJECT: OWE program, facilites, types of jobs
DATE: March 18, 1981

G: This is an interview with Dean Nicholson for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, History of the United Schools project by John Gecina, at the United Local High School, on March 18th, at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Nicholson would you please give a short background on yourself; where you were born, where you went to high school, a little bit about your parents and other family members.

N: I went to high school in Lisbon, graduated in 1954. I went to college immediately, but left Ohio State University to enter the Marine Corp. I spent three years in the Marine corp, upon completion of my enlistment married, and latter, at the age of twenty-six entered Mount Union College, where I graduated in 1966. I have a wife, two daughter--one thirteen, one twenty-one--and a grandson four months old. In 1970 I entered Westminster College at a graduate program and finished in 1973 with an M.B.D. in secondary administration. I am presently employed at United High School where I started in 1966, and still here after fifteen years.

G: Why did you decide to become a teacher, is there any specific teachers in high school that gave you any guidance toward it?

N: Yes. Specifically, my high school football coach, who was an excellent history instructor, and through his efforts, really, I majored in history at the undergraduate level, taught three years of history, government, psychology, and sociology; were united from 1966-1969. It was really his influence that made me decide on a history background at first.

G: Mr. Nicholson, we now had the OWE program at United would you tell me what the OWE letters stand for?

N: Occupational Work Experience.

G: Do you remember when it started in Ohio?

N: In Ohio the first program of such started in 1963 in Niles. Tom Hyde, one of the supervisors--the south eastern supervisor--was one of the teachers involved with starting that unit. Later, I think it was 1971, they came out with a certificate for OWE. Before I'm not sure what taxonomy it came under, then they have added to the programs since and every year it is updated quite extensively.

G: What year at United started OWE?

N: 1978.

G: Before you started teaching OWE here at United what other subjects did you teach?

N: Well, in 1969, they used to give . . . The unit under the department or the locational agriculture department in our school, it was called agricultural work experience. It resembled OWE but, like I said, there was no taxonomy for that such as an OWE certificate. You had to have a certificate in production-adding and farm management, or agriculture business and supplies. That is the type of certificate I got agriculture business and supplies to teach that. . . The requirements for the students were pretty vague in those days, as far as a criteria for selection. The number of students went along with most of the agriculture programs, but the idea of working half a day, and going to school a half a day, and receiving credit for related subjects, and work was about the same. Even though it was not as much as it is today as far as credits go. I did this for nine years, and it worked out pretty well, with some exceptions, as far as the students and their occupations. Even though this is a rural area people will tend to think that there are more farm jobs, or many more farm jobs, or agriculture jobs than there really are. It was difficult to keep students in agriculture jobs. There were jobs such as filling station jobs, some machine shops, different types of

occupations such as this but one of the . . . Not a requirement, but at least a desire of the agriculture department then was, or the State Department of Agriculture, and agriculture education, was to keep these students at least fifty percent employed in agriculture and that was very, very difficult to do.

G: In this program that you started before 1973, were there more boys than girls enrolled in it?

N: Most entirely all boys.

G: For example, how many per year could you say that went through your program?

N: Completed the program or just, started, they didn't want a two-year type program,

G: Well completed.

N: Usually on average fifteen to twenty.

G: Per year?

N: Per year, yes.

G: You had each student the whole . . .

N: The whole . . . For a long time I was self contained, that meant under agriculture I taught everything, all our subjects, which is in itself. . . All those preparation weren't easy.

G: Now did you have any of the English or history?

N: English, history, math, any of their social studies, plus related subjects to OWE.

G: Now this program, you had them for half a day; 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

N: 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. then they went to work.

G: Now in coordinating that, did you have to check on the kids?

N: Yes, we had to make sure they were working and at their employment their hours they were designated to be there.

G: How many hours are they legally allowed to work?

N: They are given credit for the hours they work up until 2:30 for school, but they can work any hours number of hours in accordance with federal and state labor

regulations, that they want to. Once a boy nowadays reaches eighteen he can work as many hours as he wants, but the credit they are given for work, is only, really, technically up until 2:30. That's our dismissal time. They are given credit for one and a half credits for work. They are given a credit each for their subject related subjects, and POD which I teach. I am certified in social studies.

G: In 1973 then, you said you changed from an agriculture OWE?

N: 1978.

G: . . . To OWE, period?

N: Right.

G: Now what does this take in, do you still have to teach all the English and history courses?

N: No, I teach only the related and to the seniors and juniors POD, American History; OWE POD American History.

G: Okay, when you say related, what type of subjects?

N: Related to all the subjects. Related to the role of work; such as banking and checking, budgeting, buying a car, and different types of insurance, social security, labor unions, how to use phone books in connection with our phones, and phone books in connection with their job, answering the telephone using a newspaper as a source of information on jobs, really just about anything connected. We show them how to fill out income tax forms, we show them how to keep their bankbooks, checking books, savings, and so forth, in good order; anything that is related to the world of work. Give them all the information they can, that they can use after they leave here, and some of the boys go on to secondary, or post secondary education; like to trade schools, industrial schools, as far as the trade industry. We have one boy now in Indiana at diesel mechanic school, we've had him in mechanic school in Cleveland. A couple boys have expressed really sincere interest in machine trades, anything that is related to this; job oriented is what this really is.

G: Do these boys apply for the jobs or, in reality do you go out and get the jobs for them?

N: I have job stations, and I have had some for years and years; where a boy might have work there a year or two years even, some have gone and stayed on that particu-

lar job full time after they left this program. Some of them, the instructor or who ever their boss might be supervisor, foreman, instructor, whatever understands, and the boy does too, that once he finishes there, he has the opportunity to look for a job full-time elsewhere, and then we can fill that slot with another boy the next year. Some of the employers I've had for years, one of them I just. . . The boy talked to this employer that I had even in AWE ten, twelve years ago and he is going put him on there this week.

G: So, in other words, you get the jobs set up for them, it is the student problem of holding the job.

N: It is his responsibility to keep the job, go to work, be punctual, dependable, loyal, and so forth. There are other occasions though, many occasions, where a boy comes in and before or wants to come in the program and he says, "look I got a job, Do I have to leave it or anything?" I say, "No, we will just go to see the employer you got now and talk to him and tell him while you are in this program there are certain requirements you have to meet, being in school is one of them, and so forth." We don't have them change jobs, A lot of boys come in with jobs like that. It is really an advantage for the instructor.

G: So in reality when these boys go out to work they are getting paid for there. . . ?

N: Oh, they're getting paid yes. We wouldn't have a boy going out just for the experience, unless he were out of a job, and couldn't find one, or I couldn't get one for him, or he lost his transportation, or for whatever reason. We've had guys stay here at school rather than not have them out running around the community and help the janitors out until school is out. Then between the two of us we try to track down all jobs, or lease for jobs, that we can find because with the way unemployment is in the area, there are so many adults taking jobs; he can be at work at say 7:00 in the morning, the adult can work the eight hours, where these boys the earliest they can possibly get out is 11:00. And well, in some cases they say, "Look I can hire a guy, an adult to do the job, and work six, eight hours, whatever," and that sometimes hurts the boy with his unemployment problem.

G: In your years at working OWE, have there been a lot of boys been dismissed from there jobs? If there has been. . .

N: No, not a lot, no.

G: Well, what would be maybe some of the things that would

dismiss a boy?

N: Well, I would say that of the ones I can recall off hand, failure to follow rules and regulations of the employer. Just like you and I, you know, if he. . .

G: They always come in late.

N: He comes in late, he is not punctual, not dependable, doesn't call off when he's going to be sick, or when he is sick, or for whatever reason there have been so many various reasons really, more than just any one that I can pinpoint; personality conflicts. I can't recall any of the boys that I have had ever dismissed for stealing, and this has been the occasion with some other programs that I've heard about, not through the teachers, or the kids or anybody, but through people who have employed these people. I have gone there to see about a work station, out of this district really, and they would say, "No, they had bad experiences with OWE kids." Sometimes it wrongfully stereotypes them.

G: Now in OWE how many girls do you have participate?

N: I have none. The girls that I had this year, those left school. One for marriage, and one because she had offered. . . She planned on quitting when she was eighteen but she had two years of vocational training and was passing all her subjects, had a chance for a full time job and in, I guess from what I gathered, she was planning on getting married too.

G: So then, in reality, do the workers that are working the job and the people they are working for, do they give them a grade?

N: They evaluate them. I have a sheet that says all different things; is the boy. . . All the personal traits, is he dependable, loyal, punctual, and so forth. Then he has different areas like does he follow orders, good, excellent, poor, or fair, or average and so forth. Can you leave him alone without supervision? Questions like this and then they put a grade more or less of one through four and most all of them come out I would say above average.

G: Then you look through and give him a grade of A, B, or C?

N: Yes, A, B, C. It is sort of an arbitrary grade, but it is the only way we have of evaluating their work.

G: Now, who funds for the program?

N: It is entirely state funded

- G: Does that mean that your salary again is coming from the state?
- N: Yes, our vocational programs here and we have four. We have vocational agriculture, OWE three really and vocational home economics, are all funded by the state.
- G: Does this include your salary also?
- N: Includes my salary, yes.
- G: The criteria for running the program, could you go through. . .
- N: Okay, first of all the boy has to be sixteen years of age, at fail usually, or be behind, one year in school at least.
- G: You mean he has to at least go a year in order to be in the program?
- N: Usually yes, that is a state criteria. Be behind his class, we have boys that are behind in our class. For instance I have a kid who is a senior really, but he is in a junior homeroom because he lacks part of a credit to be a senior. You have to have twelve credits to be a senior. He has like eleven and three quarters, but that automatically puts him in a . . . You have to have twelve to be a senior. Puts him in a junior homeroom, but he is technically a year behind. He will be able to pick up his credit throughout the year if he passes all his subjects, including OWE. Then will graduate with his class or on time. Most of them are behind academically. And ninety percent of the boys I've had, and most OWE teachers that I've had any connection with at all, most all of them have failed at least one year of entrance. That is the biggest hang-up or problem that those kids have. They get discouraged and they'll have to. . . Another criteria is they are a potential drop out. We have a Hyde scale which was developed by Tom Hyde, that I mentioned earlier as being one of the first guys who started OWE in 1963. He developed the Hyde Scale and it takes into consideration a lot of things, I'd have to give one out to explain it to you but, I have copies of it how you can use that for selection. Between myself, and the guidance counselor, and the principal, in the summer we usually go through our selection process. Usually the idea of potential drop out, the kid is going to quit, that's the main thing. They cannot have a range in their IQ, theoretically now, this is in most cases no lower than a seventy, high of a seventy-six, than eighty-nine. We have some variations on that, we don't have them lower usually, but some of them are higher than that.

- G: Do you have a specific number that you can allow in the OWE program each year?
- N: Minimum of fifteen and maximum of twenty-five.
- G: So then you'll sit down and decide what kind of people you'll have in your program.
- N: Yes, Mr. Martigan and I he's the guidance counselor we usually go over this about May, something like this, April, May. We have a potential list of names of kids who've signed up for it, as well as we check out certain kids who are not doing well find out why, and so forth. From this we select with the principal usually. Now last year we didn't have the principal involved because our principal wasn't hired until August. Then we more or less go from there. We play it by ear until we really know who needs the program the most.
- G: Now, do you find out the discipline in this program is very easy to have because you something hanging over their heads?
- N: Yes, sometimes yes, you don't like to use it as a lever but you can. Because most of them, if they should fail OWE, would not graduate then. One of the prime reasons that they are in there is a chance for graduation. You don't want to make it a gift either, but the discipline itself is not that hard to administer because, like you said it is sort of a lever. In all you have to do, most cases, just is remind them, "Hey, if you don't straighten up or whatever the case might be you know we might have to drop you from the program and put you back in the regular classroom situation." That is usually enough of an insentive for them to straighten up. We have dropped kids from our roles for various reasons. We dropped a boy from the roles this year because of attendance and that is one of the things that that kid had problems with in the past. We try to stick close to ninety percent of attendance if you are in here ninety percent of the time we know that your doing a job. Some drop below that, but the average stays up a lot higher than what people think it does. Better than some of the other student in a regular classroom situation.
- G: What type of a facilities are here to use for the OWE program?
- N: We meet the states standards. We have our own classroom, we have It is a real nice classroom, recently remodeled we have plenty of research material, I have an office with a desk and one of the requirements is we have a phone available to myself or students if they should need it in the cases of not extreme emergency,

but if . . . Well for instance, I have a boy who is not really sure everyday where he works. He works for a painter, and they might work for . . .

G: So did you meet the standards for facilities no problem and then a . . .

N: We have the phone available, like I was saying, and they use it as this boy does to check to see where he has to report to work. Along with that idea, as far as facilities, one of the first things they do when they start a new program, such as OWE, is they come in and look at the facilities and make recommendations. I knew what the recommendations would be before I started when I went to the OWE workshops before the program actually started. So, we instigated up grading those facilities before we had our pride, P-R-I-D-E, it is . . . It is initials for our evaluation every five years. Well my second year here we were subjective or came under the pride evaluation and met all the recommendations. The supervisors came and checked from the state dept of education, trades, and industry came the building, the facilities, and the curriculum, and so forth. Which you must have a course of study for in the subjects I listed, in that course of study, and I had adhere to that pretty closely.

G: So they do check on you then?

N: Oh yes.

G: Same people. Do they come around maybe once a year to check on you?

N: Well, you never know, sometimes they are here quite a bit and sometimes they are here very often. The main thing they are concerned with is that you do meet those state standards as close as possible and upgrade the course of study, because once you've turned that course of study in, they want you. . . It has to be approved by a teacher educator and trades and industry. Anything that he thinks should be added or deleted you had better do it because they want that program as much quality as possible. That is exactly what this year should be. My course of study is I got three to four more units to add this year you add to them and I've only deleted, two to three areas, and I stick pretty close to that or well as close as possible, and worked that right along with my lesson plans.

G: What specific areas are you adding this year?

N: This year labor unions, since there is so much labor union problems and so forth, a unit on personality development which may sound minor but the personal

- appearances most instructors use, goes along with that a marriage unit. . . I can't recall the other, I think there was four of them. I don't have the curriculum with me. Units that would go right along with the everyday life of a student worker.
- G: I'm sure you find these quit beneficial, or the kids find them quite beneficial.
- N: Yes, they like them a lot better than the exact disciplines in the classroom I guess, if you want to call science, and English, and math and so forth, those. They would rather have that because they can make much more use of it, so they think, even though there is a lot of value to all those subjects. There is no doubt that they need them. They think there is a lot of value to this to.
- G: Another words Mr. Nicholson you are setting the tone for the kids, their life outside of school.
- N: We try to influence them positively towards going to work and what its going to be like. Most of them are getting a taste of work and what it is going to be like, working three, four, five, six, and sometimes seven, eight hours, but most of them are part time. they don't work to many. . . To many boys will work a straight eight hour shift. I have had kids work as high as twelve hours a day or ten hours I think was the most. They had regular jobs that they did not report 2:00-10:00 3:00-11:00, afternoon shifts since we have do be in school until mid-day. Some of them have made as high as \$8,000, \$9,000, \$10,000. Other boys are mostly part time in the afternoon and in some cases they run over a little bit at night or something. Since the minimum hours has been dropped, a kid in the vocational program, eighteen years old, he can work almost any hours he wants. He can stay and cleanup until 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning. We don't care for that because they got to be in school the next day, and attendance like I said is a big thing.
- G: Another words your talking attendance here at school, so how many days can they miss?
- N: Well, there is no exact number but it starts influencing their grade after a while and they don't want to danger that grade by excessive absenteeism.
- G: Can they miss class here at United and go to work?
- N: Theoretically and technically they are not supposed to, but if it is not a habit, and I know about, there are some gray areas. You know a kid says, "Well, I started feeling pretty good about noon. I was to sick to come

to school." Technically they are not supposed to, but you have to give and take a little in this area. Because well, you yourself and myself, we both felt lousy in the morning and then towards noon or something we start feeling better. Maybe somebody does come back to work here at school at noon rather than have a full day of substitute for us or whatever. If it becomes chronic and I find out he is working and not coming to work then we have to take some steps.

G: Mr. Nicholson can you just elaborate just on a little about maybe the attitude of the students when you first started to teach until now? Is there a difference maybe in the way maybe they behave or they maybe like do their work a lot better at the beginning?

N: Well it is pretty much the same as any other kid except they are really geared in to working now. I mean they become. . . It becomes pretty much of a routine. They do their work here at school, they get done, many of them stay here and eat there lunch which we like to have them eat a lunch because its good for them get them the work, and they get in, they fall into the. Hopefully that they stick to that routine because it is going to become even more strictly regimented once they graduate. They are going to have to be there at 7:00 till 3:00; and eight hour day. it is going to be a little different then the three or four hours. As far as there attitude goes, I think it is much the same as any other student, they get a little bored now and then they get restless. you can always arm them a little bit by saying, "Look you are only here for three hours, from 8:00 until 11:00. Just get done what we can do and you'll be gone while these other kids, they have to stay in school." They look forward to their holidays off too and so forth.

G: Do you think maybe the attitude is more geared to working today than there was students who were more interested in working, making money, than they were when you first started?

N: Yes, definitely, because once they get use to that paycheck they don't want to miss that day or they get their expenses into a point where they have to work. They depend on that money and if it is not there, if they are layed off, or miss a day's work, we try to tell them, "Look hey, if you take off for any reason or you just don't feel quite like going to work, or whatever, it is going to reflect in your paycheck. Now you won't feel too bad about it until you get your check and you are going to see that its going to be a day short. Now that's no fun, you need that money just like we do." So their attitude becomes more and more positive, especially some of the kids you that never

worked before. This is a routine that they have to get into and, like I said, you and I or anything after awhile those days you look forward to a day off, a vacation, a holiday, whatever.

G: How is the administration here at United, are they backing you?

N: Oh excellent. We have one I forgot to mention one of the units is on school and community service. We do a lot of things for the school that are educational experiences, I guess you could call them, that they might not be able to get done without paying extra expenses to janitors and so forth. It is a service to their school and it teaches them that there are some things that you have to do for people or want to do that you are not going to get paid for. Like we paved the playground equipment for them, we have installed equipment, we've helped out the PTO. A number of things like that, as a service to the school and it gets them used to the idea once you get out, you know, and you are in your routine working you are going to have some spare time maybe. Well, you can donate that time. We went down a few years ago and painted tennis courts and we took some shrubbery out for the bank, and so forth, and so they know that these people existed and you do those kinds of services without pay, so to speak. Like a lot of people they want to be payed for everything but our kids we try to tell them, "hey, you don't need to be payed for everything. You have to donate your time now and then". That is one of the units I did add this year.

G: Now, for instance, during football season you would go down there and clean the field.

N: Yes, I'd help out with that.

G: You'd help out with phones

N: I put the phone system in. Before we had the new cyclone fence around the field we used to put up the snow fence around the field and down around the edges. We built, a number of years ago we built the lane, the strip lanes, for the broad jump and pole vault as a school service. We don't get into that too much anymore because since we changed from AWE to OWE their time is really. . . They are locked in where the only way we get out of class for a project like that is through the superintendent's approval and the principal and we can't go on, like an entire morning like we used to because we had shop time in AWE to; which we don't have in OWE. We have a project coming up when the weather gets nice here in a few weeks. We're going to move a flagpole for the school. We have boys who know how to

do this kind of thing to so we. . . The administration has always been great here they back you, they. . . Most anything you need in the way of materials and time off to go to meetings and so forth, no problem at all.

G: Are there any particular administrators in other words, any principals that you would like to comment on and specify on what they have done for you here at United?

N: Well, Mrs. Anderson right now, our present principal, she was a former OWE teacher. She understands the OWE student and his situation, and is sympathetic toward it but by the same token she knows that she is an administrator and not an OWE teacher and there are OWE students that we like to bend a little for them but we can't go out of our way and start playing favorites. Principals in the past, the other two that I've worked for. . .

G: What are their names?

N: Mr. Janek was our former principal here last year and the two years before that. He was appreciative of all the things that we did for the school. He used to come out and thank us as did Mr. Bumaugh and Mrs. Anderson. They've all been super people. They more or less leave it all to me, not all to me, but most of it to me. "You take care of those boys," and so forth. It is a stigma that you get connected with that an OWE boy is your boy. If he misbehaves in an English class it is not just because his name is Joe Smith, it is because he is. . . Not because he is one of your one of boys, but he is one of your boys. They get into trouble downtown and they say, "I see one of your boys." Always one of your boys you know. There is no way of getting around it, it is just a natural thing that has occurred. Other instructors have told me the same thing. That, even though you might only have them two hours, three hours a day, and they work and so forth, whatever they do reflects on the whole program yourself and you can't get away from it. Even though you have no control over some of those things. You understand what I mean by this?

G: Yes, so another words the administration has been very appreciative?

N: Oh Yes, yes. And almost anything that I have asked for within reason, and I have never asked for an awful lot, they've gone out of their way to try to get me whatever.

G: Now I would say that the Board of Education also would do that.

N: The board and the superintendent.

G: Mr. Bumaugh?

N: Mr. Bumaugh, Mr. Westfell the previous superintendent, Mr. Carter.

G: How about Mr. Carter as a principal?

N: The best that I've ever worked for, up until his . . .

C: What did he do for you and your OWE students?

N: He identified the problems these boys, sympathized with them, they were getting behind in school, some of them had been discipline problems. He also didn't want it to become a dumping ground, that every problem that teachers got in, "Well let's put him into OWE." We don't want that! He enforced the idea that we don't want to be a dumping ground. He was super with just kids you know, and handling discipline and getting along with kids and a great motivator, just a super human being really I mean. Probably one of the finest men that I've ever known in my life.

G: So at the OWE program at United you would say has got the backing all the way from the administration to the school board and also from the student body and of course your students?

N: The thing is that they don't have that much connection with the student body, we try to set it up, "Hey how about getting involved in . . . The audio visual department, rather than take a study hall." He would say, "Okay, I go to work for Mr. Fare in the AV room and take care of projectors and screens and whatever and televisions and whatever it might be." A number of times we've tried to get guys involved with reporting on different events in high school involving OWE and that or very seldom. . . It is difficult for them to do when they got to be here in school and then go to go to work right at 11:00. It is difficult to get them into a real co-curricular thing. We have had athlete's in the past. Not very many because it is difficult for a kid to work in the afternoon and then come back and go to practice at 2:30, you want to be gone. That is very difficult to do and being a former coach I sympathize with the athlete but I would prefer not to have the athlete in there simply because of the problems involved in working, practice, games and so forth okay.

G: Is there any other incidences or things that you would like to talk about in the OWE program?

N: No, I think that covers it pretty well.

G: If not, thank you very much.

N: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW