

Interview with W. James “Jim” Popham—Full Transcript

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Hi, my name is Audrey Amrein-Beardsley. I’m an associate professor at Arizona State University. We have developed a show at ASU, titled, Inside the Academy, during which we interview some of the top educational researchers in the field of education. Today I have the honor and pleasure of interviewing Dr. James Popham. Thank you for being interviewed today.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

Happy to be here.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You were born in Portland, Oregon in 1930. Tell us about your family and childhood.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

I was an only child, and therefore it was early on recognized how special I was. I never had siblings, so I don’t know what that was like. But, growing up from a middle class, lower-middle class income, going to high school, going to college, never really thinking much about what I wanted to do until, I guess until I finished my (1:00) undergraduate work, I was a philosophy major, and you couldn’t get a job as a philosophy major, very little demand for Aristotelian philosophers, and so I decided that maybe I would go teach, and that whole experience and the rather vapid teacher experience I had encouraged me to go into teacher education.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What type of student were you in elementary and high school?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

I think a little above average. I’d say a B, until I was a junior in high school, and I realized I had enough grades if I really cracked to them my senior year to graduate Cum Laude and since I had studied Latin for five years, and I liked to use Latin cum laude, I buckled down, and I got pretty much straight As my senior year, and I got out of there with Cum Laude.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Was there anything when you were in school in elementary school and high school that inspired me to become an educator and the educational research that you do?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

No, not at (2:00) all. In fact, I found small children quite repellent. The adolescent kids were tolerable, so I became a high school teacher. I really loved teaching high school, but I wanted to go back in teacher education because I had been on the receiving end of a terribly fraudulent teacher education program and to the extent that others were experiencing that same thing. So when I went to graduate school, I never took courses in testing, measurement. I had no interest in that. I just wanted to focus on instruction. Only later on, when I got into the world, I noticed that

those who controlled the test controlled the whole game, and so my field moved more towards assessment as an influencer of instruction.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You said “fraudulent teaching program.” What does that mean? Describe that.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

The people who were operating teacher education program which I was engaged (3:00) were promising to teach me how to teach, and they never did. There was at that time, albeit primitive perhaps, of reasonable psychology of instruction. People could learn how to teach, and I had not been taught how to do that. So there was much wasted time, much irrelevancy, much academic posing. And in the final analysis I left the teacher education program not one bit better prepared to be a student-teacher than I have been when I started, and it was fraudulent. It made me incredibly angry.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And that was at the University of Portland. Is that right?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

I rarely identify the institution. I try to identify it as a liberal arts university if...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You can say that to the camera.

If you knew then what you know now about education, would you have become a teacher?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

Yes, I would probably want to become an educational researcher, focusing (4:00) on assessment. I’ve learned, Audrey, that, I guess that the thing is most influential in shaping what a teacher does in the classroom is the nature of how the effects of that teacher’s efforts will be evaluated, and this means that assessment, classroom assessment, large-scale assessment, any kind of assessment carries with it some contingencies where action becomes incredibly influential; and so I would early on want to learn how to create assessments that benefit teachers’ instructional decisions. And it would be where I spend my time now and where I would’ve wanted to spend my time if I had known how to do it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So when you got your doctorate, I believe you got your EDD in 1958 from Indiana University. What did you study for your dissertation? Did you go right into the assessment field?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

No, I had no idea I wanted to fuss with assessment. I, my dissertation dealt with some aspect of instruction. (5:00) All I cared about was teacher education. I want specifically to do a better job with prospective teachers than had done with me. So I never thought about testing. So after I started teaching for a while, the test in America became high-stakes tests and began to influence instruction that I found myself drawn toward measurement as a vehicle for shaping the nature of

instructional actions on teaching.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So what did you study for your dissertation?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

Something involving the Minnesota teacher attitude inventory. It was a popular instrument at the time. The MTI and I studied it. It was one of the reasons a I always advise my graduate students that you don't want to get too transfixed by the rapture of your dissertation because odds are, you'll never end up teaching in an area associated with it. I certainly never did, my MTA and my experience (6:00) began and ended with my dissertation.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Why did you choose the EDD versus the PhD?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

At the time at Indiana University there wasn't a tremendous difference in the nature of the classes you took. The only difference was the language, and I was already skilled at Latin. Why would I want another language? And I wanted to finish up the degree as soon as I could to back into the teacher education game.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Why did you choose Indiana University?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

It's a strange reason. When I was working on my Master's degree in Oregon I had taken a course with a professor who had been formally the superintendent of schools in Portland, Oregon, and the Dean of the school of education at University of Illinois, his name was Willard B. Spalding. I was impressed with him. I thought, “Well, Big Ten institution—they're pretty good.” And so I applied for research assistantships at several and received an offer at the University of Illinois and Indiana University. And I went to Indiana because they had better (7:00) married student housing. At the time, I had a child and wanted to find a place where I could work on a degree. I got to Indiana University, and then all the people I was studying were at the University of Illinois, where I could've gone. So, Lee J. Cronbach and a galaxy of famous people were over there, and I would've had to drive to see them. So I, I cannot say that my decision regarding choice of institution were born of enlightened good sense.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay. Tell us about your first academic position.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

It was a college in Kansas. Kansas State College of Pittsburg. When you grow up on the West Coast, and you realize you're close to heaven, and you want to come back and end your life on the West Coast, and I felt one of the best ways we could do that was to go to the Big Ten institution somewhere out in the Middle West where you could command prestige and head out to the West Coast (8:00) again to Oregon, California, something like that. I got to Indiana

University and finished my degree there and discovered that Indiana U placement officials had marvelous contacts, but only in the Middle West. And frankly, one of the only jobs I could get was at Kansas State College at Pittsburg—a small state college there. I went there and was happy to have the position, and enjoyed it immensely because it was a small faculty. You got to know your colleagues. We had a number of bright, young folks there. So it was a great experience. I enjoyed it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Where did you get tenure?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

Where did I get tenure? I guess the first bona fide tenure I had, as I understand you got tenured two years ago and that's why you're looking so tranquil and complacent at the moment. The first time I pursued tenure was probably at UCLA, and I had never been any place. I taught at Kansas State Pittsburg, went on to (9:00) San Francisco State for a couple years, and then ended up in UCLA in 1962, specifically to teach a course instructional methods that I found most reprehensible when I was a teacher education candidate. So that's where got tenure, and took about I think about four or five years to get it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So you went to UCLA, you arrived in 1962. You stayed there until you became Professor Emeritus in 1991. There, and for nearly 30 years there, you taught courses in instructional methods for prospective teachers in assessment and measurement for undergraduate students. You based your initial work on that of B.F. Skinner?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

When I was, when I was a grad student and immediately thereafter I was very impressed with Skinner's behaviorism approach. You don't remember this because you're too young, but there was a period in the late 50s when the American educator was transfixed with the joys of teaching machines (10:00) and programmed instruction. And so I read a lot of Skinner's thinking about that and became very much interested in programmed instruction as a vehicle. When I got to UCLA, although I was working very hard with prospective teachers, I also was doing a lot of work in programmed instruction, and Skinner's the work was seminal and influenced my thinking a great deal.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your friend and colleague, David Berliner, recalls meeting you around this time while he was a graduate student at Stanford. You were a young UCLA professor and leading the national charge to develop behavioral objectives. David was with you firmly in the behaviorist camp, but one of David's professors at Stanford, Elliot Eisner, who we are also interviewing for this show, was against this whole movement. You were invited to meet with Stanford faculty and engage in debate, and David fondly recalls having the good fortune to be sent to the airport to fetch you. (11:00) Do you remember that?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

Oh, I remember quite vividly, and I thought that David Berliner was a was a person well-marked

for chauffeur duty. I sensed he had an aptitude for left turns that was very difficult to beat. No, I remember that ride quite well. And to this day, whenever we are doing anything together, I encourage him to drive. He doesn't want a tip. He seems to accept that very congenially.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And do you know what he calls you?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

No, what does he call me?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Mr. Jim.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Driving Mr. Jim?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Driving Mr. Jim.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Well, that's true. Stanford was nest of really smart graduate students and amiable professors, and Elliot Eisner, who you mentioned, was a wonderful proponent of a softer, if you will, approaches to education, and I'd have Elliot come down and teach in my classes at UCLA, and he'd have me come up and teach some at Stanford. It was a wonderful (12:00) relationship. The first time I met Elliot, actually because you are going to be interviewing him elsewhere. The first time I met Elliott, he had presented a paper at the American Educational Research Association, and I was in the audience. It was a paper dealing with behavioral objectives. Now I was a strong proponent of behaviorally phrased instructional objectives, and so Elliott spoke out vehemently against these things. I remember standing up at the end, and I said, "This is a golden moment for me because I have never previously heard any hour presentation with which I disagreed with in total. There is not a single thing that you have said that I concur with. So we had a lovely discussion thereafter. So, Elliot and I became good friends.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do you think that behavior objectives have a place today in schools and instruction?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Oh, we made a serious mistake in the behavioral objectives movement. We equated, and I was right there screwing up with the rest of them. We equated specificity with utility. We though the more specific an instructional objective was, (13:00) the more it described clearly how a student should behave at the end of instruction, the more guidance this would supply for teachers. But the truth is, that we overwhelmed teachers with far too many behavioral objectives, and as a consequence, they simply failed because there were just too many of them. The truth is now, just state an outcome according to how you can judge whether or not a student has accomplished, it means you have to focus on the measurement. So, instead of having statements of content standards or instructional objectives, or goals, you might as well move directly to the assessment

because that's what supplies you with the information to tell you whether or not the kid has done it, has learned it, has mastered it. And so as a consequence, I don't think behavioral objectives have any role today.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What are your thoughts about the Common Core Standards coming?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Well, as as I just suggested common core curricular aims, I call them, (14:00) that is what we want students to become, until you supply measures, they're just talk. They're just rhetoric. They're words that sometimes means something to some and not so much to others, and the net effect until you know how they are going to be assessed, you don't know what they are. So I think we have to wait to see how we will assess students' mastery of the Common Core.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Eva Baker, your former teaching assistant, research assistant, doctoral student, colleague, co-author and counselee, remembers memorizing your lectures, including content details like emphases, gestures, and throat clearings. In your course you played April Fool's jokes on the teacher education students, usually about their midterm grades. Your course focused on the paradigm, a science-fiction land called Capaga (14:52), where teachers were responsible for student learning. You threw fake boulders at students who were not paying attention. You printed and gave out bumper stickers saying, (15:00) "Help stamp out non-behavioral objectives," a slogan you thought was hilarious and properly obscure. Your students, and in fact all audiences loved you for your clarity and your amazing humor. Most of those who I talked to before the show best note your wit and your humor as one of your best qualities. Why humor and that which you do as a teacher and a writer?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

It's an interesting question. You know somewhere in one's life, you discover what your strengths are what your weaknesses, and if you are accurate in that discovery, you can exercise good judgment styles to use them. I don't remember, I think I was in high school when I realized for the first time that I could make people laugh, and in fact, I was just thinking about it, there was a physician when I was growing up (16:00) called Dr. Brandenfels, and he was from Germany, and he could restore follicles, supposedly. I mean, it was, you know, we've been dealing with the loss of hair, I find hair frightfully disturbing, frankly, and if one has to have it the way you have yours is okay. But I remember as a kid growing up and reading the local papers about this German doctor, Dr. Brandenfels, and so I remember organizing a presentation for one of my English classes—I was a high school student when I was talking about hair doctor, and, and they laughed, and I like that, and so I found I could make people laugh, and sometimes therefore if you can use humor as the vehicle for explaining something and keeping people interested for a time, it's a very effective ploy. So it's become something I do pretty routinely. (17:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about the triennial travesties at the AERA.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

The triennial travesties were started in 1969 as a an attempt on the part of the members of AERA to poke fun of themselves in a benign manner, and they've been offered every three years since because the times every three years nothing comes of consequence happens, and so we found it appropriate every three year interval. So every three years, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association we've been holding these travesties, and we get prominent people to come up and try to take a genial swipe at our field—satirical exposé. And sometimes they're simply brilliant repudiations inaneth qualities of educational research, and they've been wonderful. David Berliner, for example, I was able to persuade to do one (18:00) once, only once, and he was quite good. I mean, David has a delightful sense of humor, which if honed, could get him a long ways in life. But when I asked him to do this, he agree, and he gave a masterful presentation, but he was simply terrified by it. He would never do it again, and we've had wonderful people of Michael Scriven, for example, Lee Shuluman, people who can be fundamental hilarious. I mean, Lee Shulman's original presentation, or maybe it was the second time or the third time, but he gave this masterful analysis of the relationship between factor analysis and psychoanalysis and introduced this marvelous concept called factor envy. It was simply a wonderful, anyhow, so we've had some very great people through the years and every three years we try to put one on.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your friend and colleague, Joe Ryan, remembers the time that you had him on stage, and you did something with (19:00) hats.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I've done things with many forms of costume, including underwear of various sorts. So, no, I don't recall the exact hat one, but I remember Joe Ryan did a very nice job for us.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What did reading Bob Glaser's 1963 article, an American psychologist, where he contrasted norm-referenced and criterion-referenced measures, have to do with the transition and your scholarship?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

There are moments when you read an article, and at the time it doesn't really speak to you the way it should. I read the Glaser piece because Bob Glaser was involved in program instruction. He was at the University of Pittsburgh and had done some very nice work in teaching machines and programmed instruction, and because that was my interest, I read what he said. But (20:00) honestly, Audrey, it didn't it didn't influence my conduct until a few years later. I was teaching this course at UCLA for prospective teachers, prospective elementary, secondary teacher, and it was a large class, 400 students, and I worked very hard to on the course. Not only did the course start getting better, I wanted to start studying my exams. And my exams, at first, had very strong reliability coefficient, .85 for a professor-made test, that's very laudable. But then the course started getting better and better, and as a consequence, the students started getting more and more adept at the final examination, and you'd have 80% of them getting a top scores. And so my lovely .85 reliability coefficient dropped in a period of two and a half years. I ended up with a negative reliability coefficient, and it was only at that point when I look back, I thought, "How can I be (21:00) working so hard to make this course great and getting a negative reliability

coefficient?” Only then did I look back at the Glaser article. And then I finally found myself becoming very entranced with the notion of criterion-referenced measurement.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You later wrote a groundbreaking article titled, “Implications of Criterion-Referenced Measurement.” This article was perhaps the most widely reprinted article you have ever written. Tell us about that article.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

That was a culmination of what happened in my classes with the negative reliability coefficient, reading Glaser, thinking about it. I had a very close friend and colleague, now deceased, Ted Husik, and Ted and I would talk about this issue. I remember kind of lying in front of my fireplace—I lived down in the San Fran Valley at the time, the only place I could afford—and Ted and I, sitting in front of the fire and talking about this, and I decided that because nothing of consequence had been written between 1963 and (22:00) then I suppose I submitted the piece in ‘68 because nothing had been written. There was something desperately needed. I think only one article appeared between the Glaser piece. And so Ted and I set out to kind of think through what was involved in criterion-referenced measurement and tried to get more people involved in that approach because you can’t, you see, whereas traditional, norm-referenced approaches to measurement, norm-referenced approaches in which the focus was on comparative score interpretations, whereas that was fine if you wanted to get people into a fixe-quota situation. When you were trying to have instruction benefit, benefited by measurement then a criterion-referenced methodology was what you wanted to have. By this time I had realized finally that measurement was so darn important to instruction, and so I wrote that piece, and I thought it through very carefully.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do you think about the criterion-referenced test that came about as part of, in part due to No Child Left Behind in 2002?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

The tests that (23:00) we’ve seen in education, in No Child Left Behind, is no different than were in place earlier. You see in a sense, it’s inaccurate to talk about a criterion-referenced test—it really is because what you have is a test, and it yields a score, and from that score you draw an inference, or you make an interpretation, and it is the inference that is either criterion-referenced or norm-referenced. And you could have the same test produce a score for which you can make a criterion-referenced or a norm-referenced inference. Now what happened after No Child Left Behind is there was tremendous pressure to have tests at all grade levels, three through eight, and something in high school, and people were simply selecting whatever test happen to be on the shelf, and the ones that happened to be on the shelf, more often than not, were for more conventional, traditional sort were norm-referenced in their (24:00) orientation, and so those tests were very prominent, and, and what people were doing at the state level were grading their own test, they called them criterion-referenced tests, but because you have a test that is criterion-referenced, it doesn’t automatically mean that it will be useful to educate children better. You have to conceptualize a test such that it uses a very clear applications for action on the part of teachers, and the test that we have throughout this country, largely because of neglect on the part

of the federal officials, who were spending that money, those tests have not been very helpful to education.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do you think that the large-scale, standardized, criterion-referenced tests, as they're referred to, are useful for instruction for teachers?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Better than nothing, for sure. In some cases, barely better than nothing because they're not well-conceptualized (25:00) with teachers' instructional decision-making in mind. You have to create a test such that a teacher has some clue as to what the kid can and cannot do and can direct instruction toward the particular shortcomings that a given child has to have, or, or displays, and, and this is just not often seen. It is possible, imminently possible to create tests that yield accurate pictures of instructional quality that is a good evaluation instrument, but yet, can simultaneously supply some guidance for teachers who want to know how better to teach children. And the state of Wyoming is an instance where they've developed a statewide test that does that. David Berliner, and Jim Pellegrino, and I, and others have been involved in working with them, so it can be done, but the federal officials who crafted No Child Left Behind and who implemented gave no guidance to state officials regarding the kinds of tests that should be used. And they simply used those that were (26:00) available, and they are flat out wrong.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So where is, what is the perfect assessment lie? At the local level? At the school level? Or the classroom level?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I can't imagine that the perfect assessment can be built by busy teachers or school districts where they have a shortage of trained personnel. I think you need some horsepower to make an assessment that would really pay off for teachers and for kids, and that means I would lean more toward the state level. Or, indeed, it could be national, if you wish.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And what about the types of end-of-course assessments and end-of-subject area?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Well just because a test is called an end-of-course assessment doesn't mean it's going to be any better. You've can have the same kind of bonehead mistakes for an end-of-course test as you can for an annual state accountability test. And, and I'm frankly fearful that many of the tests now being warmly embraced because they're end of course (27:00) tests, are going to be very shabby instruments, indeed. Remember, Audrey, not many people understand the fundamentals of how you create and evaluate a test. They just don't know how to do it, and they're well-intentioned, but many of the tests that come out of these efforts to create end of course exams should be sent directly to the shredder and not pass go.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Including college professors at the higher education level.

Video 2

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

After retiring from UCLA, you spent hundreds of hours working with real world educators who really didn't know much about the kinds of measurement procedures that are called for in today's schools. This led to your books like, *Modern Educational Measurement, and Classroom Assessment*. This is a book I use in my classes. Because, as you noted, educators receive little formal training and educational measurement as part of their studies. Why is this important?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

This is probably the most important question you'll ask me, and indeed any other interviewer interviewee that you do in the series. And the reason for that is, I've done a lot of thinking about our current educational situation, and not many people are happy with it. They know it's not as good as it ought to be. It's better than many people think it is, but it can be made better. And I've analyzed, for me, the most significant reason that we have (1:00) fallen behind in our schooling is that we have allowed mistakes to be made regarding educational assessment that have influenced adversely how we run our school. For example, when the education profession simply allows the wrong kinds of tests to be used to judge the quality of schools, judge the quality of teachers, then as a consequence, bad decisions are made regarding schools, regarding teachers, curricula are narrowed, teachers spend too much time preparing kids, teachers and administrators engage in dishonesty. All of these terrible things are happening because educators allowed the wrong kinds of tests. I mean, it's like fundamentally using the wrong kind of test to accomplish a very worthwhile mission, and that being the case, how do you change that? Well, you get the educator to be more knowledgeable regarding assessment. (2:00) This is a really tough challenge. The reason I spent a lot of time writing books at not a scholarly level but try to communicate with regular folk, is because I want people to understand the core constructs of educational assessment aren't that mind numbingly numerical. They're common sense, and if they only knew what these fundamental notions are, then they'd make fewer mistakes. And the most obvious one is that we are using the wrong kinds of test to judge the quality of schools and teachers. This is insane.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In *Testing, Testing: What Every Parent Should Know about School Tests*, you write a primer for parents this time, who want to better understand testing. What do parents also most need to understand about educational testing today?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

There are your fundamentals notions regarding assessment. An example (3:00) would be the concept of educational validity. What what you're doing is you're trying to arrive at a valid interpretation about something you can't see. What the kid knows about reading or mathematics, or whatever it is. You're giving a test to get this behavioral response, and you're trying to infer from that response what the kid can do. That's validity. And all that means is accuracy. Do you come up with an accurate estimate of what the kids is doing inside this scope, and so those are

examples that parents can understand. Now why is it important for a parent to have that notion and that validity accuracy applies to the inference and not the test? Because if you think that a test is valid, all of a sudden the test becomes more majestic, has more power, has more certainty with it. What we want parents to realize is that when teachers make inferences about (4:00) their children, those inferences, those judgments, can be mistaken. And that's a really important notion. It's not a perfect test. It's an imperfect judgment. So that's an example that parents should know. I think that children, students should know about assessment as well. It's crazy for this kind of knowledge to be used only by educators. Students' lives are going to be affected by a test, and they ought to know the fundamentals. And the fundamentals aren't that many, and they're fairly readily understandable.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your impression about using multiple measures along with these tests to make decisions about children and schools?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Clearly the more evidence you have, the better approach to decisions will be. I'm going to start a new book next week, in fact, on teacher evaluation, and the approach to evaluating teachers (5:00) that I will recommend I'm going to call something like a weighted evidence judgment. Weighted evidence judgment—what does that mean? What it means is that human beings make judgments about the quality of the evidence and the extent to which some evidence is more important than others, and those human judgments influence how you judge the quality of a teacher. Now that's the same way you ought to approach the judgment about a student or anyone else. You look at all the evidence you have available, decide which of it is compelling, you weight it, and then you arrive at your best judgment, now your judgment may be in error sometimes, but we're going to reduce the number of bad decisions if we use human judgment.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

With the current federal policies, the way things are going, a lot of states are using tests, now high-stakes tests, along with observational measures in teacher evaluations, and the correlations that we're finding between the test scores, the students, the aggregate test scores of a classroom (6:00), and the teacher observational scores are very low, in the .2, .3 area. Why do you think that is?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

The reason, again, is attributable to assessments illiteracy, and the failure to recognize that whenever you use a test, and students' performances on the test, to judge the caliber of teachers' efforts, or the caliber of a teacher staff's effort of the school, whenever you do that, you must have evidence that the test is able to distinguish between well-taught and badly-taught students. That is that the test is instructionally sensitive—can tell you the difference between a kid who was well taught and poorly taught. Now, we have no such evidence of these tests now. These tests are being used throughout the land without any evidence that they're suitable for that purpose. This is absurd. And if this would happen any other field, whether it was plumbers or accountants, we'd be shrieking about it; (7:00) but here in education, we use these off the shelf tests, for which we have no evidence that they distinguish between bad-taught and well-taught kids. This is bizarre. And the fact that, again, educators are willing to put up with this. They are

willing to put up with this because they don't know enough about assessment.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The introduction to your book, *The Truth About Testing: An Educator's Call to Action*, in 2001, is aptly titled, "How We Arrived at the Unhappy Place." You argue that high-stakes tests are doing serious educational harm to children, based on their use in most settings. Of what harm do you speak?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I believe the caliber of schooling in this country is so much less effective than it ought to be. As a consequence of teachers being preoccupied with raising student scores on the wrong kind of test. (8:00) If you think about the kinds of tests that are used in this country to judge the quality of schooling, whatever is tested by those instruments, influences what goes on in classrooms. Teachers are like all of us, like you, like me, we want to do well. We want to succeed. We want to perform our job properly. And as a consequence, if the way we judge the quality of schooling is my youngster's scores on this test, I certainly will do whatever I can to raise those scores. And this is way you see often, you see curricular reductionism, where the only thing that is taught is what's on the test. Or in many states where you have far too many curricular outcomes being measured, you end up in a situation where you have teachers trying to cover everything at no depth at all, nothing stays. So there is some terrible education going on in our schools now as a simple function of using the wrong test. I really believe (9:00) that the single most fixable and most harmful consequence of testing is reduced educational quality. If we fixed all of the tests, if we had really nifty-poo tests, and all states uses instruction-sensitive tests, and they're the kinds of tests that I would applaud, would that mean that every problem be fixed in education? Of course not. But it would be a heck of a lot better. And that's what we must strive for. A lot better.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do you think we're getting "a heck of a lot better" with President Obama's Race to the Top initiative?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Unfortunately, I think the aspirations of the Race to the Top initiative, while commendable, have got to be followed up with sound decisions at the next level with the regulations on for these kinds of operations are created, much as when we established No Child Left Behind, and we didn't give guidance to states as to what (10:00) kind of tests would make the darn law work. Now we have Race to the Top, when we say there must be reliance on student test results to judge the quality of teachers, and yet we give insufficient guidance to states regarding how to make those tests really benefit education. Now is this because of a malevolent administration? I think not. But it is a reflection, I think, of insufficient knowledge regarding the kinds of tests that help improve schooling. I don't think they know the difference. I think they believe that a test is a test. It is clearly not.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You serve on the governing board of the national assessment, the National Assessment Governing Board, right?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Yes, the National Assessment Governing Board.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

For the NAEP. What are you doing at that level? Talk about that service.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

First, I am very important. So, you must really recognize it, and, in fact,...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

We're interviewing you for that.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Right. And I would prefer that you call me Your Eminence whenever you have a doubt about what to say. But the National Assessment Governing Board (11:00) sets policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. And the National Assessment of Educational Progress has been in place for many, many years. It was not a test designed to influence instruction. And indeed there are some people who would think it were very inappropriate if it did. So, fundamentally, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP, is an instrument that is not suitable for improving the quality of instruction and simply serves as a kind of external audit mechanism for other things that are going on. Do I think that this test can ever have an impact on the quality of schooling? No, I don't. When I accepted the appointment, I sent a letter to Secretary Duncan saying I would do everything I could to influence the NAEP direction without destroying its fundamental mission (12:00) as a kind of a monitor. I would do everything I could to improve the, have that test to improve the quality of schooling; and I've really tried for the two years or so that I've been on the board, and I've come to the conclusion, Audrey, that that test can't be done.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do you think that's the best test that we have going? The gold standard?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

No, I do not at all. It's a test deliberately designed to have no instructional implication. You can't tell what to do from the test. For many years, as you may know, you only reported results at the regional level. Now recently, relatively recently, have reports at the state level. So, let's say you're a state who doesn't do well on NAEP, what do you do about it? Damn little. You don't know what to do about it. You don't know where the deficits are, you don't know how to move forward, and this to me is galling. If I look to a place where (13:00) improvement would be forthcoming from assessment, it wouldn't be NAEP. Now we have two new assessment consortia that are attempting to create tests that are designed to assess students' mastery of the Common Core State Standards, and one can hope that the resulting tests there will be better. So I would look to those kinds of sources if the people creating those tests are shrewd about it, they could have an impact on instructional quality. But I doubt very much where the NAEP will have much of an impact.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Speaking of formative assessment, your book, *Transformative Assessment*, 2008, and its sequel, *Transformative Assessment in Action*, you clearly outline the benefits of using formative assessments in these ways. You also provide what you termed as a learning progression model to help educators use test data in formative ways. What is that? What is the progression model that educators can use?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

The formative, the formative assessment process is very simple. All it involves is teachers or students using (14:00) assessment data to make adjustment decisions. Not to adjust necessarily because they may have been doing very well. But, if you get the information, you're a teacher, and you look at the information, you decide whether or not need change something, the way you are teaching something. If you're a youngster, you say, “Do I have to study something in a different fashion?” Now that's all there is to formative assessment—the use of assessment data, assessment of various kinds, to make decisions about whether adjustments need to be made. Now, if that is the case, when do you gather this information? Well you gather this information not everyday because that's overwhelming, too much work. You don't gather it once a year—that's infrequent—it doesn't fill the job. So you have to pick the moments at which you should gather the information to make the adjustment decisions. Most people who are working in formative assessment refer to the trajectory, the learning trajectory of building blocks that students must master in order to get to the final outcome. (15:00) And so if, for example, you have a one-month unit dealing with a particular cognitive skill you're trying to promote, you might identify the two or three places along the way where students are supposed to master a body of enabling knowledge, or perhaps, a sub-skill. And it is at that particular juncture, the learning trajectory says, here are the moments where we should collect information. It's at that moment that in fact, you gather the information for which you make the adjustment. It's not very complicated.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What assessments best inform that?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

There can be a variety of assessments depending on the curricular aims involved. I mean, in some cases, all you're doing is literally asking the students to keep you, the teacher, informed regarding how well you're understanding something. So you have little red and green and yellow cards on their desk, and if they understand what's going on, they have a green card up; and if they get a little confused, they use the yellow card; and if flop up a red there, and you look out as the teacher and you see a red seat, (16:00) you realize whatever you're saying is not being well understood. That student simply self-reported knowledge to you. But for a teacher, that can be very influential. And you can make up your mind about whether or not you want to change something and how you might change it. So, the whole function of formative assessment is simply to supply information about consequences so you can make a judgment about how effective the means were.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And if we had to choose between the summative and formative aspects of testing, would you say that one trumps the other, in terms of importance?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

No, we don't have to choose, and just because an interviewer asked you that, you don't have to do it. They have such different functions, Audrey. I mean, ultimately, I want to judge teachers, I want to judge schooling, by what happens to kids. I'm a strong fan of summatively oriented assessment. I want to see the evidence that kids have learned (17:00) well, that my tax dollars have been well spent. Summative is very important to me. On the other hand, there is such an incredible array of evidence suggesting that formatively oriented use of classroom assessments can benefit children, that for us not to use them in American schools is, in my view, essentially immoral.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In general, in the tests that we are using to evaluate things like formative assessment use, are the tests that we're using to evaluate these things sensitive enough to pick up these effects in your opinion?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

The tests that we are currently using to do whatever we are doing in American schools today, in general, are not very good. Okay, start with that. Have I seen instances in which teachers can create tests that yield data from which accurate decisions can be made about adjustment decisions? Absolutely. This is doable. It's not that terrifying. I mean, think about what's happening (18:00) in the field of teaching students composition. Kids can write a lot better than they could when I was a high school English teacher. They can because we assess periodically their ability to write, and we monitor it, and we modify what we're doing if they're having problems. The whole writing process is fundamentally a series of formative appraisals of seeing how well kids can do. So it can be done. But the vast majority of tests that are out there aren't that very good. I mean, the whole interim test that we see used three or four times a year to produce evidence supposedly related to the big summative test. There is no evidence—none at all—that these tests work. And yet, American educators are spending enormous amounts of dollars, and much of their instructional time in pursuit of interim assessments for which we have no evidence.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

David Berliner, again, reminds us that you both believe that teachers are often not being recognized on assessment instruments for all that they accomplish and they do (19:00) in their classrooms. How might we do this better?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

The notion of a test of instructional sensitivity is really so crucial. If you have a test, for which there is evidence, that it legitimately can distinguish between a student who is well taught and badly taught, and you can collect such evidence, if you have such a test, then good teachers will quickly demonstrate that they can get students to learn what they ought to learn, and bad teachers similarly will not be able to so demonstrate. So, if you have the right kind of test in there, then you can make the right kind of decisions not only about which teachers need to be identified as requiring more assistance and support, but also those who are really first rate will come shining through. So, if you use a test that is suitable for the purpose for which the test is being employed,

you'll be able to use the results of that test. (20:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You mentioned Wyoming before. Revisit that if you would. What are you doing in the state of Wyoming that's turning out so well in terms of their assessment system?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

There was some leadership in the state of Wyoming where at the time, the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law, they recognized that this test would have an enormous impact on what happened in classrooms. And so they decided to jettison their recently completed state test and create an alternative state test, which would be instructionally supportive and, in time, they hoped instructionally sensitive. Now, by instructionally supportive, I mean that they focused a very modest number of very significant outcomes. In reading, for example, they had only eight big skills, K through 12, eight big skills, and they describe them very well. So the teachers in Wyoming, they knew that if they could just get the kids to master these eight powerful skills, (21:00) then those kids would be efficient—pretty efficient readers. Now, in fact, that's exactly what happened. Teachers, after several years, finally got the idea, began teaching towards these powerful skills, and then they measure each of the skills with enough items on the test, so you can tell whether a child has or has not mastered that particular skill—giving the teacher feedback to know this is a skill that needs more attention, or giving the teacher, the students' parents feedback on the fact that the student needs to work harder on this skill. So you can build that kind of a test. If tests are built by people who have their instructional, their instructional wits about them, you can have first rate tests. If tests are built by measurement traditionalists, it'll be same ole, same old.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What are your thoughts now about the increased emphasis on measuring growth and value added using large-scale, criterion-referenced tests?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

The value-added methodology has some serious (22:00) deficits. I recently learned that you're working on a book to deal with that issue. I think it's perfectly legitimate to employ approaches to measure students' performance that give teachers a leg up for promoting growth, even though they may not have promoted sufficient achievements to get many students up above the proficient level. And I think the work that's being done now in the state of Colorado and about 25 other states using student growth percentiles, where you're fundamentally controlling for a student's entry behavior. I mean, it works like, and you probably understand this already, but, let's say you take all the kids who on last year's test who scored at 37 items right, and you see on next year's test how that kid ranks in a statewide percentile, what you're looking for is to get the students you teach who came in (23:00) with that level of behavior up and better than the rest of the kids in the state. And so you have a relative, now that doesn't norm-reference, if you will, comparison, but it does allow us to identify teachers, who, over time, can consistently get more of their students irrespective of entry behavior up to a high level. That's very powerful. So growth is something I think ought to be assessed, and student growth percentiles seem to me to have more promise than value-added methodologies.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In your most recent book, *Unlearned Lessons, Six Stumbling Blocks to our Schools' Success* in 2009, you identify unlearned lessons and offer broad, practical solutions that can be implemented both at the national and local level to improve our schools. What inspired this book?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I think, as you reach a point in your career where you, you've made enough mistakes, you look back and see (24:00) if there's some way to avoid them. Earlier you asked me about behavioral objectives. I mean, I was an ardent proponent of behavior objectives. It was something that I spent every working hour promoting, and yet I made a terrible mistake. I had not realized that too many objectives, essentially, overwhelm educators. Yet, here we have today curricula in most states that have far too many curricular aims. So I see today, the same mistake that we learned about and wrote about 30, 40 years ago. And so, that had happened in several arenas, and so what I simply did was look back and realized that I had made many of these mistakes. And I hate to see them remade.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So what are your suggestions for schools that come from this book, in terms of improvement?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Well I identify six problems (25:00) that I think, to me, are the most important ones, and if a person hasn't read them, the book, they're probably deficient on many counts, and they ought to go out and get a copy right away. It's yellow—it has a nice cover. But, for each of the so-called unlearned lessons, I try to suggest something that ought to be done. Let me illustrate. One of the things that I think we made a serious mistake about in our field is we don't routinely measure student affects—student attitude, student value, student interest. That's really important stuff. And you can measure these economically at the group level, not on the individual level, but on the group level, you can measure student affect very effectively; and as a consequence, if you start measuring student affect, then teachers will start doing something about making a kid like mathematics, or be confident as a learner, and so on. These are the kinds of dimensions, and what I suggest in the book is, with some examples, is we start building these (26:00) measures, and routinely administering them. And so on each of the cases of the six lessons, I try to suggest what might be done.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your extensive publishing career includes to date, 30 books, 200 journal articles, 50 research reports, and 175 papers presented before research societies. Again, you are also often praised here for using a humorous writing style purposefully and engagingly, and also writing practitioner-friendly and accessible articles. You often write in *Phi Delta Kappan*, is that for that purpose as well, to make sure that it gets in the hands of leaders and teachers?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

If you think you have something that warrants being said, you write about it. Look, I mean, some people who will be watching these interviews will be graduate students. As a graduate student, I thought that if I got something in print, it would be read and acted on, and the world would change. This isn't the way it goes. You have to keep drumming (27:00) the same bongo again

and again before maybe it reaches maybe the right person at the right time. And so what you do is you try to write stuff in an accessible fashion—in a way that’s going to be read as opposed to put down after the first few paragraphs. And you hope, and that’s all you can do.

Video 3

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So in terms of traditional academia and the way that we value publications, and a lot of the articles that you’ve written have been in wide readership editorially reviewed publications, what are your thoughts about, especially for graduate students that are coming into academia here soon and also non-tenured professors that are trying to earn tenure, what are your thoughts about publishing?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

Candid advice: if you’re seeking a career in academe, you have to make a decision about whether you’re happy at the institution you are. Let’s say you’re at a college where there’s a great deal of emphasis on preparing teachers and administrators, and what you realized is that you’re happy there. And for that institution, it may well be that influential pieces, potentially influential pieces, in more widely read educational journals may be the way to go. If, on the other hand, you (1:00) are at a place where the orientation is clearly publication in independently refereed journals, scholarly journals of the highest prestige, and you’re happy there, then you have to aim for those kinds of publications. I had the liberty of writing what I wanted to after I got tenure from writing in the scholarly journals. So my early efforts were all in scholarly refereed journals. I couldn’t resist an occasional silly piece just for the hell of it, but the truth is, the early stuff was far more academically oriented. Then later on, you can reach a position. Now there’s a certain point where I get tired of looking at data. I say, “I don’t want to do a t-test. No, I don’t.” And so it’s more fun to write in a more casual manner to try to influence people. I guess, Audrey, everyone decides, you decide, the college decides, what is the motivation. For me, it’s always been (2:00) potential impact. If I do something that I think has a greater likelihood of reaching one more teacher, one more school administrator, that’s the thing I’ll be writing.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Dylan William, your longtime friend, notes that your most significant achievement in this way is you combine passion for the improvement of education with the respect for the work of teachers and what they do on a daily basis. Joe Ryan adds that what he most admires about you is that you constantly, effectively, and importantly bring the discussion of measurement and assessment back to the central issues of effective instruction and student learning. You do very well at grounding your scholarship in the real issues of teachers and practice. Margaret Heritage adds that your most significant professional accomplishment is that you ground the concept of assessment in teaching. There is a theme here. You care about teachers and students and want what’s best for them and make complex issues digestible for them. Paul (3:00) Sandifer agrees, noting that your continued work to make assessment results meaningful and useful has impacted literally thousands, while your years as a member of the faculty at UCLA graduate school in

education has helped train others, and your many contributions to the professional literature have no doubt had positive influences on your readers, the end game in all of this is what happens with the students. Since 1968, you have continued to serve as the director of IOX Assessment Associates, working with states and others on their testing and assessment systems. Tell us about this work.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

The points you made about focusing on instruction are accurate. I think that once I found myself a high school teacher, and realized, not overnight, but in the first couple of years, that I had to make decisions about how to teach those children, (4:00) I think the focus on instructional decisions became overwhelming in my life. And the reason I gravitated towards measurement is because measurement results begin to influence instructional decisions, so it has been a preoccupation of my career. I get offended when I’m sitting in technical advisory committees where groups of us advise state measurement people on how to play the measurement game, and no one even thinks about instruction, or kids, or learning, or students, and it’s just vexing to me. And so I guess when you really think about how you can change that, you end up both writing articles about criterion-referenced approaches to instruction and assessment, and then you find yourself trying to advise states so they will do better assessment at the state level. And for a while I headed a group that built statewide high stakes tests (5:00) for about 13 states. My effort to actually do it. And it’s interesting, for graduate students, because as long as you are an academic advocate, you’re pretty much free to say what you want, but the minute you become a doer, and you start producing the tests, as I did, I had to say goodbye to objectivity because everyone thinks you’re advocating criterion-referenced measurement approaches because you’re selling criterion-referenced tests. So when you move into that arena, you move into it with some peril.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You’re also the founder and leader of the Annual Triannuals, which we discussed. You’ve received multiple awards for your scholarship, including distinguished alumni awards, outstanding publication awards, and the AERA American Publisher’s Award for Outstanding Educational Research in the field of Instructional Materials. You are also the founding editor of the AERA journal, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, most recently you received (6:00) outstanding or lifetime achievement awards from the National Council on Educational Measurement, the National Council for Research on Evaluations, Standards, and Testing, The Association of Educational Publishers and Jason Millman Award for the Consortia for Research on Educational Accountability and Teacher Evaluation. This is just to name a few of your awards and your honors. You have received also several distinguished teaching awards, including many at UCLA, the Harvey L. Eby Award for the Art of Teaching, and honored in 2000 you were recognized by *UCLA Today* as one of UCLA’s top 20 professors of the twentieth century.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

This particular award, I must say, meant a lot to me because that was for the full twentieth century, the entire hundred years, not this short one that we’re dealing with now. That was that hundred year baby, and to be a top 20 professor there, that counts.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's quite the feather in your cap.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Oh, yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You have also received multiple awards for your service, (7:00) so you're the full well-rounded professor. Most recently in 2009 you were appointed to the National Assessment Governing Board by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. In addition, you have served in multiple leadership roles for AERA, including as president. Is it true you have attended every AERA since 1958, your first one?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

This last week, I attended my 55th straight AERA meeting. Let me tell you a story about the very first one. I was a graduate student, and the meeting was in St. Louis, and there were only about 500 people, now there are 15,000. But I was presenting a paper, and I was presenting a paper in a concurrent session, so there were two sessions, only two session concurrent sessions, and I was presenting in this one. Well, it turns out that the other concurrent session speakers had encountered car trouble or some kind of trouble, and they couldn't show up. So, instead of being (8:00) in a concurrent session that split the audience, my concurrent session had everyone there, like a general session. And I'm looking down at the front row, and here are all these incredible professors that I've been reading about, Lee J. Cronbach in the second row. I was so terrified, my knees were absolutely shaking. So you'd think that that experience would have kept me off it. No, AERA has been a wonderful place for interacting with colleagues and for learning new stuff. Yeah, 55 straight.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And having fun, too, with your Triannual.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Yep.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

From 1969 to '70, you served as the president of the California Educational Research Association as well, and you also received the lifetime achievement award there. But how did you get to be a commissioner?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

The truth is, when we saw the approach of the election of Senator Gore or (9:00) Governor Bush, everyone was talking more and more about the need for accountability and the need for more testing. And that was at a time when high stakes tests were already doing serious evil, I thought, to our schools. So I was able to form with support of a number of national organizations, a group, and including David Berliner, and Jim Pellegrino, and Eva Baker, and some prominent folks, and our group deliberated on how you could create a test that would simultaneously be useful for accountability and yet could support instruction, and we did not know what to call ourselves, whether we should call ourselves a group or whatever. And it was David Berliner who

said he had never been a commissioner and would like very much for us to call ourselves a commission, so that he could be a commissioner; and so we said it largely to placate David's need (10:00) for importance.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He adds that the cheapskate never gave him his commissioner's badge.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

He got what he deserved.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Nothing. You were also the Prince of the Rose Parade here in Portland as a child?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

This is not widely known, but should be listed prominently in my vita. When I was at Sunnyside Grade School, one of the prominent features of June in Portland, Oregon is the Rose Festival; and I was designated as the Rose Festival Prince of Sunnyside Grade School. It's a prominent notion, and I think I should get more credit for it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Some people that responded to this said it's your most significant accomplishment to date.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

These are stupid people.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

They're your friends.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

They are nonetheless.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Rick Stiggins also notes that you're quite the tennis player. You've been playing tennis for quite a bit. Is that right?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Rick Stiggins thinks I'm a good (11:00) tennis player because Rick Stiggins is so bad. This is what we call regression effect. If you're that deficit, everyone looks better, and Rick has almost no talent.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He says that you kick his but every time.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Quite so; but it's a very easy butt to kick.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He also recalls the time while you were on a conference program together, it fell to him to introduce you. Do you remember what happened?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

No, I do not. I tend to try to forget anything associated with Rick.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You had an artificial hip?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Oh, he, I did have a hip replacement, and he referred to me as being artificially hip; which I thought was kind of maligning. But it was okay. Rick's a good guy.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So he kicked your butt on the stage, huh?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Rick's a good friend.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Margaret Heritage remembers recently presenting a workshop with you at a European conference on assessment. The Europeans treated you like a rock star and lapped up everything you had to say. She also said that on the dance floor, you showed everyone what a mean dancer you are; (12:00) but what was it with the tall, blonde, Swedish woman?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I think the fact that I was given near reverential treatment by Margaret's European colleagues...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your eminence.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Offended her, and I can understand that because, you know, when the guy is getting compliments, and the girl is viewed as just there, so, there was a dance session, and I was dancing with Margaret until the tall, blonde, Swedish person arrived, and then I encouraged Margaret to get food.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The end.

But in all seriousness, when you reflect on your career overall, where do you believe you have had the greatest impact?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I truly don't know, Audrey. You, I know that what you do in your career, at least what I have

done, is you try to make the moves you think will increase the odds ever so lightly (13:00) of something good happening. That's all you do. In the Catholic Church they used to talk about an occasion of sin. Occasion of sin was a place where a young man could go awry by being in the backseat with a girl or something. Well I'm talking about a reversed occasion, an occasion of success. You set up a situation so you think there's just a little likelihood that something good will happen. And if you can increase the odds ever so slightly, then maybe, the next time around, something good will happen. So what you do is in a lot of arenas, you try to make the moves you think will benefit. And I don't know which of those have been successful. I hope that two or three have.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What's next for you? What haven't you accomplished that you'd still like to achieve?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I'm terrified, right now, by the prospect that teachers will be evaluated around this country in an inappropriate manner, and I'm going to start a new book. I'm giving myself four months to write it (14:00) on the problem, the title, *The Misguided Evaluation of America's Teachers: How You Can Help Fix it*, tells you what I want to do. I want to describe to these people how they dare not use the approaches that they're currently contemplating for evaluating America's teachers. I was one of those teachers once, and to be evaluated with some of the schemes that are being proposed now is just wrong-headed, and I'm trying to forestall that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You said, "I was one of those teachers once." I was one of those teachers once as well. So do you think that adds extra insight in terms of your research?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

You know I was asked in an interview just about a year ago at ASCD—they've published a lot of my books, and I like them a lot. There was an interview, kind of a promotional kind of an interview, and someone just like you, not as bright, not as attractive, asked me the question, "Dr. Popham," she referred to me formally, "Dr. Popham, (15:00) when was the happiest part of your career?" And I hadn't been asked that question before, and I really did pause to think about it, and it was when I was a high school teacher. It was just, it was wonderful being a teacher. And that experience has influenced everything I do.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What inspires you?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Brownies. Chocolate brownies. Fudge chocolate brownies with extra chocolate chips.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And chocolate on top. Who do you believe has had the greatest impact on you and the person and scholar you have become today?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I think many professionals have a single individual who has influenced their behavior. I don't. I think my influencers are an amalgam of marvelous people, (16:00) many of whom I can still call friends who had an impact on me, many of whom you are interviewing in this series. But it's not one person. It's an idea here from David Berliner. David Berliner has only had one idea, so it's easy for me to remember his. But many people have contributed, so it's not just one person.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do you find uninspiring?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Uninspiring? Define uninspiring.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The opposite of inspiring. Loathing.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

The absence of inspiration. I find tree bark really uninspiring. Many people get excited about tree bark. I personally find it quite without interest.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Or hair. You mentioned hair earlier, right? (17:00)

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Oh, follicles of growth are vastly overrated. When I did an original guest show way back when the National Institute of Education was in operation, they had a week long show, it was a wonderful show with wonderful people like Congresswoman Barbara Jordan being judge and stuff like that, and I was on camera everyday, and they videotaped this thing and then showed in nationally, and they had to use so much pancake makeup to take away the glare that they began to call me Flapjack. Now I personally found that a little offensive, but nonetheless, it showed that hair wasn't important.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite word?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I have no favorite word. I have deliberately taken a pledge not to have a favorite word because it makes the other words envious, and you don't want jealousy in your vocabulary.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You don't want to marginalize the others?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

No, no, no. (18:00) I promise.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Favorite curse word?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I have no curse words because I eschew profanity in all forms.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession, other than your own, would you have liked to attempt?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I would like to, I would like to be a specialist in tree bark. If I could only have become a tree bark aficionado, I think I could have been happy.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Could have made a greater impact on the world.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Yes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession, other than your own, would you have not liked to attempt?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I think a lot of kids always want to be athletes of one kind or another. I wish I would have had the athletic ability, it would be wonderful. I used to play, I'm a table tennis player, I'm a tennis player, but I'm very average. It's kind of fun to play.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Favorite book?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

I don't know if I have a favorite book. I've read a lot of Skinner. (19:00) You know it's kind of a funny thing. When you embark on a career, you have to decide how you're going to spend your hours. At one point in my life, I thought, "I can either read it or write it." And I chose to write it. I mean, I am less well read than I should be.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Interesting. If you could tell President Obama one thing, what would it be?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Listen to Jim Popham.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could have dinner with anybody, dead or alive, who would it be, and why?

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

Would the person be dead while I was having dinner with them?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That would be gross.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

Yeah, I know, but it’s kind of an interesting image. Dead or alive. I would probably have to figure out, I wouldn’t mind having dinner with David Berliner because he’s a very cheap date. He doesn’t know the difference between good wine and bad wine—Carlo Rossi is his favorite, I mean, that gives you an idea. So David would be fun.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If Heaven exists, what would you like to (20:00) hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates.

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

That it is not a norm-referenced system.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Finally, what advice might you offer to graduate students and beginning researchers who hope to make a contribution to education and educational research?

W. JAMES “JIM” POPHAM

I would try to watch this tape very frequently. Not just once, but perhaps once per day.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

When asked to capture the essence and nature of James Popham, David said your most significant professional accomplishments cut to the essence of who you are. Like many leaders in the field, you are smart, though few are as witty. Like many leaders in the field, you are hardworking and well published. Like many leaders in the field, you are committed to a better educational system, and thus work a lot on the problems of practice. And like many leaders in the field, you are always optimistic that things can always be made better. You take lots of things seriously, but you find (21:00) ways to make us laugh at the same time. Margaret Heritage adds that you are a trusted friend who is honest and never says anything you don’t mean. You are always one of the funniest people she knows. Your sharp wit is second to none. Paul Sandifer adds that with your high intellect, high energy, high professional and ethical and mastery of the bon mot, you’re just the Energizer Bunny, you just keep on going. And Dylan Williams adds he has yet to read one of your emails that has not put a smile on his face. He also notes that your most significant accomplishment has been your discovery of realization that once a man has passed adolescence the only way to look really cool is to shave one’s head and grow a goatee. Eva Baker notes that you have taught her the fundamentals underlying much of what she thinks. When she was in her 20s, you taught her how to work hard. When she was in her 30s and 40s, she denied the significant influence that you had on her, and then in her 60s and 70s, she recognizes you again (22:00) for your centrality to many of her strongly held views. She also answers the oft asked question, given her generation, “Where were you when President Kennedy was killed?” She respectfully gets to answer that she was with Jim Popham observing teacher ed students in a junior high school. Joe Ryan notes that you are a consummate educator ever focused on the need to be clear and sensible in defining what we want students to learn and

recognizing that the proper and most useful role of assessment is in providing teachers useful information that they can use to help in the process of teaching. And finally, Rick Stiggins notes that you have not been trapped by a particular vision of excellence in assessment, as have so many in the measurement community. Rather, throughout your career, you have been constantly out on the edge, striving to see assessment through new eyes, challenging accepted beliefs, assumptions, policies, and practices. When you have been right, the impact has been profound. When you have been wrong, you have openly (23:00) revised your thinking. Well there is no doubt that we have not been trapped, but engaged and lured by esteemed excellence in assessment and everything you have done for students and teachers in schools and us as educational researchers still grappling with educational assessment and educational assessment policy issues. On behalf of all of us, future educationists, educational reserachers, and the like, we thank you, Dr. W. James Popham, for everything you do, and for most being you, given your humor, wit, tirelessness, and all. Thank you very much.

W. JAMES "JIM" POPHAM

You are very welcome.