

# *Oral History Interview with James A. Figueroa*

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**JAMES A. FIGUEROA**

**Interviewed by Cuba Z. Miller**

California Department of Education  
Adult Education Oral History Project

California Department of Education  
Adult Education Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

**JAMES A. FIGUEROA**

Los Angeles Unified School District  
1963 - 2000

Division of Adult and Career Education  
1969 - 2000

Assistant Superintendent  
Director, Adult Education  
Principal  
Assistant Principal

Instructional Consultant, Adult Basic Education Office

May 17, 2001

Rancho Mirage, California

**By Cuba Z. Miller**



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None.

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## PREFACE

Adult education in California has a proud history of helping its citizens to meet the challenges of life in a huge, complex, multicultural state. Through the years, California adult educators have provided leadership to the nation in the development of innovative instructional practices and creative educational solutions.

The California Adult Education Oral History Project began in 1992 as a companion to a print history of adult education commissioned by the California Department of Education. The oral history project started with a small group of leaders whose careers began in the 1950's and 1960's and who witnessed and influenced important events in the development of the nation's largest adult education program.

To date, twenty-seven educators whose careers span seventy years have participated. They represent the varying professional roles, organizations, and geography that comprise our state's diverse adult education programs. Their stories tell how California adult education met the needs of citizens in the wartime 1940's, and those of veterans and an exploding population in the 1950's. The growth and energy of California adult education in the nineteen-sixties, the institutionalization of competency based education in response to the influx of refugees and immigrants in the seventies and eighties, the innovative uses of technology of the nineties, and visions for the new century have been recorded.

Significant assistance to the project was provided by the staffs both of the California State Archives and of the Oral History Program, History Department, California State University, Fullerton. This project could not have begun without the vision of Raymond G. Eberhard, Administrator, Adult Education Policy and Planning Unit, California Department of Education, and the support of the late Lynda T. Smith, Consultant, Adult Education Policy and Planning Unit.

Linda L. West  
April 2002



## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### Interviewer

Cuba Z. Miller

### Interview Time and Place

One interview was conducted in Rancho Mirage, California, on May 17, 2001.

### Editing

The interviewee reviewed and edited the transcript. When the tape was inaudible or when necessary for clarification, some information was added and is indicated by brackets [ ].

### Tapes

The original cassette tapes were transferred to reel to reel format at California State University, Fullerton and deposited with the California State Archives.

PROJECT: California Adult Education Oral History Project  
INTERVIEWEE: James A. Figueroa  
INTERVIEWER: Cuba Miller  
DATE: May 17, 2001

CM: This is Cuba Miller interviewing James A. Figueroa in Rancho Mirage, California, on May seventeenth 2001. Jim has recently retired as Assistant Superintendent, Division of Adult and Career Education of the Los Angeles Unified School District. The purpose of the interview is to record his recollections of his career and the events and trends in California adult education during that time.

Jim, you've spent all of your thirty-seven year career in public education with the Los Angeles Unified School District. I know that you started at the elementary level and then rather quickly moved on to adult education. Tell us about that beginning and what led to your transition to adult education.

JF: Well, first of all, I started in the L.A. Unified School District actually four years before I began teaching. In 1959 I started as a part-time playground worker when I was a freshman in college. And that work – working with kids kind of got me interested in education. I didn't know what I was going to do, like so many people entering college (chuckles). Working with the kids after school and on the playgrounds on Saturdays, and so forth, I just took an interest in it. And then I was very lucky because I'd had an elementary principal who kind of liked what I was doing, and she told me, "If you get a degree and you want to go in education, you have a job here at this school." So it was kind of an incentive to go into education,

which I did. Went into elementary education and got a job there at that elementary school in 1963 teaching fourth and fifth graders. And that was my first teaching job.

CM: Combination class.

JF: *Combination class.*

CM: Good way to start.

JF: And I loved it. I can remember my first class because I had, I think, thirty-six kids and twenty-seven of them were girls and only a half dozen or so boys (both laugh), and it was so easy. The girls were so good. So I did that for a year, and then about – in 1964, I believe, there was an expansion of the federal adult ed(ucation) moneys. Classes in L.A. Unified were greatly increased, classes in English, so our principal at the time asked me if I wanted to teach a class there in the elementary school in the evenings for the parents. And I said, "Sure." I could use the extra money. A young married father. It was going to be a two-night a week, so that wasn't too bad. So I decided to do that, and I did that for about a year.

And then about a year later, the L.A. Unified began a big ESL (English as a Second Language) program for kids, and it was a program where – and I think there was federal money. I think that was the original Title I (of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) moneys that came in. So what happened was they chose about thirty people throughout the district to be full-time elementary ESL teachers, and I was one of that group of thirty chosen.

CM: Since by that time you've had all of one year's experience teaching ESL. (both laugh)

JF: Teaching ESL to adults. And we were trained. It was great, because they took us in the summer, gave us a three or four week intensive training program, paid, which was

so unusual. And we had some world-renowned ESL people, Mary Finnocario from New York, a lady from the Philippines – I'm trying to remember her name – world renowned, had written a lot of literature and textbooks in the area. We began the program then. And at the same time, what we did was try to connect my night class, my adult ed class, to the daytime class. So what I had was young people who identified as non-English speaking, and we pulled them out of the classrooms. Every hour I had a different group of kids by grade level. And then I had the parents at night.

CM: The first family literacy before it was called that.

JF: Exactly, yeah, exactly. And the wonderful thing about it was, the kids in the daytime knew I was going to see their parents at night, so you talk about [classroom] control. (chuckles) The best control of any teacher at that elementary school. (both laugh) But that gave me an early appreciation of connecting the parents and the children, and connecting their education. Because then I began to realize how powerful that was.

CM: When did you transition into full-time adult ed?

JF: In 1969 there was another expansion of federal dollars. L.A. Unified had an adult basic education (ABE) program with one supervisor, a central supervisor, and positions called consultants, which are kind of like teachers on special assignment. So there was extra money to expand the classes throughout the district, and there was some support needed. So I was chosen as a consultant, teacher on special assignment, to assist Bob (Robert) Rumin, who was the supervisor of the adult basic ed program at L.A. Unified.

CM: Quite unusual for a full-time adult ed position to come from the elementary school

base.

JF: Right. What happened was – it was kind of interesting because I had developed an interest in adult ed and I had this in my head, I wish I could go full-time into adult education, but I didn't know how to do it. There wasn't a lot available. But there was a full-time adult school in L.A. Unified called *Cambria Adult School*, which was before the current Evans Adult School. And there were a lot of foreign visa students there at that time. They hired full-time teachers on the same pay rate as the elementary and secondary. It was just a small group, but they had an opening and I applied for it, and I got called for an interview. It was funny because the interview I got called for, I thought I was being interviewed for an ESL teacher in adult ed full-time, and I walked into the office, and it was totally different. It was Bob Rumin interviewing me for one of these out of the classroom consultant positions. And I said, "How did you get my name? How did you even know I existed?" And it was through the elementary principal that I had and then the adult school principal, both women, by the way. (chuckles) Luella Card at the time at Garfield (Adult School), because the class I was teaching was a branch location of Garfield Adult School over in East L.A. So she had given my name, and I was selected to do that in 1969. I was thrilled. I'll never forget it, coming home telling my wife it was going to be not only full-time, but it was going to include summers. At that time, during the summers, we as teachers were always looking for extra work to help support your family, so this was going to be a year-round assignment, so that's really . . . .

CM: Well, very good, and certainly to the benefit of adult ed, that's for sure. We'll be walking through your career, Jim, but let's set the framework first. Just describe for

me the Los Angeles Adult Education system, the divisions and something about the number of schools and students, and that kind of thing.

JF: It's, as you know, the largest adult ed system in the country.

CM: Is it in the world? Do you know?

JF: I'd like to think so, but I don't know. It would be nice to research that sometime. But it has a system of twenty – and this varies according to the year, but when I left it was twenty-nine community adult schools. Each adult school is an independent unit, independently accredited by WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) with a full administrative staff, full teaching staff and support staff, serving the communities. They call them community adult schools. And it's geographically placed. And then the division of adult ed also administers the occupational system, the ROP/ROC (Regional Occupation Program/Regional Occupation Center), which is about ten occupational and skill centers in the Unified School District. So altogether, there's thirty-eight or so adult education centers, vocational training centers, the ROC/Ps, throughout the district. The superintendent of the division oversees all of those thirty-eight schools, and the principals report to that assistant superintendent [and his] support [staff]. There's a director for adult education and there's a director for the ROC/P program to give support and assistance.

CM: Jim, are the vocational skill centers in the ROC/P centers, are they the same or is there a different framework for the ROC/Ps?

JF: It's a totally different funding system.

CM: I knew that. That's why I was wondering what the relationship between . . .

JF: The adult ed is funded under the adult education system and the ROC/Ps have a

different – it's kind of a similar structure, but it's a different rate, and so forth.

CM: But what I was asking is if all of your vocational centers were ROC/P funded.

JF: Yes. Except what's happened over time, there's been a recognition that you can't just deliver vocational education in isolation. The biggest barrier to so many people getting jobs is the literacy skills. So what we've done is infuse a lot of adult ed programs into the ROC/P centers to give support, so they become some kind of blended centers over time. So they have a little bit of each funding. The adult ed program is funded by the adult ed fund, and then the ROC/P funded by the vocational funds.

CM: And I know at the Friedman Center, there's actually a full adult school co-located . . .

JF: Exactly. Right next to it. But every one of them has an adult ed component, has a learning center for basic skills, has the adult programs, and that kind of thing.

CM: Okay. Now, I know that it varies. You have peaks and valleys just like everyone else, but about how many students does the . . .

JF: Every year (chuckles) – this is a number that staggers you. Every year, we touch about four hundred and fifty thousand people in L.A. And that means people who may just come one time. But that's the actual number of registrations every year. If you take a number, like a snapshot on any given day, there's about a hundred and twenty five thousand people in class.

CM: In class.

JF: In classes on any particular day of the year, right, throughout the system.

CM: Now, when the amnesty thing was going through, you even went above that, didn't you?

JF: We went way above that. And the amnesty had a way of – it brought more people into the system also and created a greater demand, because people who got a little taste of education in amnesty went on to other things and brought family and friends with them. So it had a real impact on the whole system.

CM: Okay. Now, tell me just a little bit about your district office organization. I know you have the director of adult ed and director of voc(ational) ed, but you also have a series of – I don't know what they're called now – specialists, consultants, whatever they're . . . .

JF: We have an instructional unit in the central office which gives support for instruction across the district so that we have some semblance of consistency across the district. So there's a director of instruction also, and that's a person who is at a high level, above principal, who oversees all the instruction. And then there's a group of individual specialists: *ESL*, basic education, *Diploma Plus*, which is the high school diploma programs, parent education. All the major areas – the ten mandated areas – have a person who specializes, and then you provide support to the field. Under each specialist, usually there's a consultant or two to go out to the field and work with the teachers and the administrative staffs.

CM: And are those specialists responsible for the staff training within their area?

JF: Yes. Two ways. They're responsible for the staff training in that particular mandated area, but the local school is also responsible for their own training. So it's kind of – they work hand in hand trying to develop a staff development program.

CM: Okay. Now, you said you had twenty-nine community adult schools now, but we all know that all classes aren't held in the adult schools (chuckles). Any idea how many



class locations?

JF: Yes. And that varies. It varies by the day. It changes every day. When I left, there were over a thousand locations in L.A. Unified where a person could access an adult education class – over a *thousand*. And that might be a church site, might be a parks and rec(reation) site, it might be a senior citizen center, might be a rental location, a business.

CM: That's just staggering.

JF: And it is staggering. So each school – well, you can just multiply it out. It's no different than any other adult school in California. It's just multiplied.

CM: Each school has their fifty sites, or whatever.

JF: If you have thirty schools and each one has thirty, that's nine hundred right there, and that's kind of the average for most schools is about thirty or so locations. And it's grown, I think, since I've left because with the CBET (Community Based English Tutoring) money, there's a lot more classes now in the elementary schools, and they've really branched out quite a bit.

CM: Yes. That's one good thing that came from that. Okay. Oh, just one more question on the system. About how many teachers do you have?

JF: There were about thirty-five hundred teachers and about fifteen hundred support staff, classified staff, clerical staff, custodians, teacher assistants, that kind of thing.

CM: And you could call them all by name, right?

JF: Oh, yes, every one of them. (both laugh)

CM: Okay. Let's go back to your first adult ESL classes, and I'm going to ask you what they looked like. And by that – just kind of a class profile, who was there, what was

the classroom setup, the physical arrangement, what kind of materials did you use?

JF: The first class I taught.

CM: Yes, that you taught.

JF: It was in elementary school.

CM: No. The first adult class that you taught. Oh, but it was in the elementary school.

JF: It was at an elementary branch location of Garfield Adult School and it was over in East L.A. And it was 99 percent Hispanic, and mostly Mexican, because that's the area. *The area still hasn't changed* very much. There were a handful of Cuban Americans, or the Cubans who had come in from Cuba at that time, in the sixties. But the majority were from Mexico. Varying degrees of English. It was kind of a multilevel class, and so we had to group people and work with a lower level and a higher level.

CM: That's one place that your elementary background came in handy.

JF: And used people to mentor and tutor, and that kind of thing. There was an old textbook at the time that was used in L.A. Unified, probably around the state. And I can't remember the name of it. It will come to me. But it was in wide use, but it was very inadequate. So what I did was take a lot of visuals that I used during the day with the kids and transposed them into use for adults at night. We did a lot of standup exercises, a lot of just getting people to talk, using pictures, and that kind of thing. As well as . . . we had to follow the textbook. That was an L.A. Unified kind of dictated thing out of the ESL Department, so we did follow that. But I integrated it with other materials because it just was totally inadequate. *English 900*, that was the series.

CM: *English 900*. I was going to suggest Lado or . . .

JF: Everybody used that.

CM: Yes, *English 900*. But anyway, you picked up a lot of these techniques then from this training that you had had, concentrated training.

JF: There was no training in adult education. We were just kind of thrown in. Other than the ABE program, which is kind of interesting, because at that time, the ABE moneys came in from the Adult Ed(ucation) Act, and they provided . . . . That money provided some training but only for those teachers. And the teachers in L.A. Unified were not integrated real well into the total system. It runs like a separate system with the federal dollars and the local dollars. And that's changed over time too.\*

CM: So in those early years then, the adult ed division didn't have a lot of support to provide teachers when you first got started.

JF: Right.

CM: Okay. All right. Now, we'll move on then to when you got your full-time job in adult ed as this instructional consultant with the ABE office. What were your duties there, and who were . . . . Now, in your job, did you work just with ESL or did you work with both ABE and ESL?

JF: Both ABE and ESL.

CM: Okay. And then, who were the instructional leaders in ABE and ESL at that time that you were instructional [consultant]?

JF: Bob Rumin was overseeing the ABE programming. And there were three of us as consultants: myself, Lonnie Farrell, who just recently retired also from the district,

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\* ABE money, ABE grants, and ABE funds refer to the federal grants which became available starting in 1966. In this instance, ABE is used in its broad sense, meaning all basic skills, including ESL. The grants supplemented – and did not replace – local and state funding.

and a man named Jack LaGuardia, who also retired a few years ago. So the three of us shared an office and shared support for teachers. And what we did was divide the district geographically by ABE programs, where the ABE programs were. And we would actually go out physically, meet with teachers, observe teachers, try to help them with techniques and methodology, try to bring them new materials, research new materials, try to get things so that we got off the *English 900 series*. (both chuckle)

And then we did an interesting thing. We recognized that more and more people needed to attend classes during the daytime, that it wasn't just a night school program and people had needs for various times. So we began a lot of day programs throughout the district. And as it began to grow, we realized we needed to concentrate services so that people could move from ESL into basic skills and eventually into high school diploma programs. So we tried to develop a system of centers around the district. And we did. There were about seven or eight ABE centers established throughout L.A. Unified, geographically spread out so that they kind of covered the district. And they became full-time ABE centers and it became a full-time career for an ABE teacher to work in those centers. They could actually get full-time employment. And that was a big move forward.

CM: So the organization that you have today actually had its beginnings during this time that you were serving as a consultant downtown.

JF: Yes.

CM: Jim, what were . . . . okay. We've been talking about seeing the need for transition and that kind of thing, but what were the, in a little broader sense, the major concerns

in adult ed at the time? And you've mentioned a couple of times federal funds began to come in.

JF: The population of L.A. was changing dramatically. There was a real push-pull kind of thing among adult ed professionals and among administrators to recognize the emerging population of people who needed ESL, people who needed citizenship, basic skills versus kind of the old, which was a lot of arts and crafts, a lot of programs for older adults. It was almost a different socioeconomic group that was being served by adult ed that began to change. So that was a real struggle. I can remember that, trying to get people to recognize that we needed to shift some resources into these basic skills type programs. I'm trying to think what else was a big struggle at the time. Funding always was. Although at that time there was no cap,\* and it was a different funding system also.

CM: Well, at that time, you generated the same revenue limit as the rest of the district, didn't you?\*

JF: As the rest of the district. Yes.

CM: Did you get it, or did the district keep part of it?

JF: From what I understand, the district did keep part of it. So there were a lot of tradeoffs that way, but I don't know the details of that.

CM: We mentioned the influx of federal money at that time. Now, I know that in your district not every school accesses the ABE grant funds and that there's some kind of arrangement with the state on that. Do you want to . . . .

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\* "Cap" refers to the maximum amount of average daily attendance (a.d.a.) the state will fund.

\*\* Revenue limit is the amount of money a school receives for each unit of a.d.a.. One unit of a.d.a. is generated for each 525 hours of cumulative student attendance.

JF: That's changed dramatically over time too. I think that is beginning to happen and needs to happen. At that time, because the district had decided to concentrate its ABE dollars in the centers, that's where the majority of the money went so that they were geographically covered but not necessarily each school. I think there were twenty-eight adult schools at that time, and I think we had eight centers, or something like that, one in Southgate, one in East L.A. (Los Angeles), one in Watts, one in the (San Fernando) Valley – two in the Valley – one in Venice. So it was geographically covered, but not every single school had the ABE dollars. So that was set up early on and apparently accepted. I don't know the history of whether there were actually negotiations with the state or whether L.A. Unified just did it.

CM: I had heard that every school didn't access [the funds] because that would take so much of the pot away from the rest of the state that you sort of -- that it was kind of a gentleman's agreement that you wouldn't . . . .

JF: But over time, what happened when I left, I think they really began to recognize that every school needs some of those services. I think there was a general thinking in the early days that some communities needed the funds more than others. So it's concentrated in the areas of high employment and low literacy levels. So that may have made sense for that time. There were pockets of L.A. that were more affluent, and so forth, and maybe you didn't have as great a need. Now, L.A. has changed so dramatically that all communities have a need. So what we've been doing is trying to integrate what used to be the ABE centers. They're now full-service centers and not just ABE and not just ABE funded. They are now funded by the regular revenue limit with the ABE dollars [giving] more support. And now, over time, the goal is to

get the ABE dollars to every school.

CM: Okay. And also during this time, you had a short foray into the community college level of ESL.

JF: That was interesting. There was a man named Don Mills, and he was an ESL expert in the state of California, Dr. Mills. He asked me to go teach part-time over at Long Beach City College with an eye toward maybe switching full-time. And that was kind of tempting, because their full-time teachers were getting full-time pay and only teaching fifteen hours a week. (chuckles) It was very tempting. But I didn't do it. I taught part-time at night. Long Beach at that time was undergoing a great change with the Indochinese populations coming in, so half my class was either Mexican or Guatemalan or El Salvadorean or South American, and then the other half was various – Vietnam, and so forth.

CM: Southeast Asians.

JF: But that was a great experience. It really basically was. Even though it said Long Beach City College, fancy title, English professor and all that, I was teaching ESL. It was ESL4. It was no different than the ESL in LA. Unified that I was teaching before (chuckles).

CM: I've always been kind of amused, because we know that, that it's the same, and yet, people of the community college will say they're Professor So-and-So. (chuckles)

JF: And they were getting ABE dollars at that time.

CM: And our poor teachers are just ESL teachers. (both laugh)

JF: ESL teachers, right. And they're paid a better salary too, I can recall.

CM: Yes. They always have and they still do. All right. After what – about five years at

the district office in this consultant position, you went into a direct administrative [position], starting with Evans Community Adult School. And Evans is kind of a special school, isn't it?

JF: Oh, that was a great experience in my life. But first of all, it started with . . . I was called into the office, and Abe (Abraham) Friedman said, "We have designs on changing you and making you a full administrator. Get your credential." So I did. I went to school and taught nights at Long Beach. Went to school the other couple of nights. Was gone all the time. Got the credential. And then he offered me first a – well, he kind of tempted me. Abe was an interesting man. And kind of threw something out on the table thinking I was going to turn it down because it was so far from home. I lived in Orange County. There was an opening in the San Fernando Valley, which would have been a sixty mile drive, at the Bilingual Adult School they called it at the time. He said, "Well, we have an assistant principal" – vice principal they used to call it in those days – "opening. Do you want to consider it?" I said, "Oh, yeah, I'll do it." He said, "No, wait a minute. Wait a minute." (chuckles) He didn't think I was going to bite is what I found out later. (both laugh) He said, "Stick around three or four months. I'll have something better for you." I said, "Okay. You're the boss." So sure enough, three or four months later he called me in and said, "We have an opening for an assistant principal at Evans Adult School, and it's the largest school in L.A. Unified, largest adult school. It's full-time. And it will be off campus. We'd like you to go there." I was thrilled. Right in downtown L.A., right on Figueroa Street, my name. (both laugh) And I drove in from Orange County and then took that assignment, and it was just really a wonderful assignment.



The school was basically an ESL school. And it was world renowned for teaching ESL. And we had eight levels of instruction. People came from all over the world to attend that school. People came from all over the County of L.A. So it wasn't just geographically, like the other adult schools were where they attended to the local community, but it was really reaching out throughout Southern California. And the ethnic breakdown was wonderful. We counted the languages one year over there, and there were eighty-six different languages spoken at that school. And people from all over the world.

And because it was so renowned, you had a little higher level of educational level, and the students who came there – because they found their way from Orange County, from even as far as San Diego, I can remember. I can remember people from across the mountains in the Lancaster-Palmdale area. I can remember people from Oxnard and Ventura coming to attend because it had such a name. It was a very young group, number one. It was almost like a young college campus. It was kind of interesting that way. So there were a lot of activities for students. We had clubs. They had the club from Mexico and the club from Guatemala and the El Salvadoran club, and then they formed little teams and we had intramural-type sports.

And then we had actual competition among schools. We actually entered – I can remember once we had a soccer team started, and we actually competed against USC (University of Southern California) and at that level when soccer was not big in this country and the universities weren't big into it. And we played against the community colleges. I can remember Glendale College and UC (University of California) Irvine. I can remember playing against them. And our kids would win

because they were so good. We had former professionals from other countries (chuckles) on this team, and it was great. (both laugh)

But it was just a real experience because, number one, it was so large. There were ten thousand students a day attending that school, most of them full-time, so that was their full commitment. We had a thousand F-1 visa (student visas issued to foreign students) students at the time, so that really . . . . You have that group of students who come in highly educated from different countries with a little bit of money in order to do that, so that group of young people was exciting.

CM: That's a different ESL population of what most of our classes are.

JF: And the Evans Adult School ran a different strand for them. The visa program was so big they actually had a visa strand where they all went together, didn't integrate in with the rest of the student body until later when the number began to drop. So that was my start there. And I was so excited. And then within about two to three years – I was there seven years – it changed dramatically, because then the Indochinese population began to come in and what was then a very mixed student body . . .

CM: The second wave of Indochinese that came in so low in skills.

JF: That's right. And that dramatically changed the schools so that all of a sudden, within a couple years, I think 60 percent of the student body then was Vietnamese or Cambodian, that kind of thing. And that was a whole different group, because then the educational level was a lot lower, the cultural problems that people had to deal with, and teachers went through shock. They had been used to a different kind of student body. So there was a lot of unhappiness among the teachers. I remember there was a lot of hand holding with them, there was a lot of staff development into

the culture, the new culture that was coming into the school, and how to deal with it. Habits were different. Just normal, everyday things that you take for granted were different.

CM: Well, yes. As I say, that second wave, particularly with the hill people that came in, had to teach them to use the bathroom.

JF: Yeah. That was a shocker for so many of us.

CM: That teachers had difficulty coping with.

JF: And then we had – just basic things like toilet paper in the bathrooms. That was a real premium for them. People would take it. So that expense just mounted up. Or people urinating in the sinks versus the urinal, not knowing. That was a real learning experience and that became part of the ESL lessons. (laughs)

CM: Yes. Now, had you had literacy level, the preliterate ESL classes, prior to this group of the Southeast Asians coming in?

JF: No, no. Not that I recall.

CM: Then I'm sure that you got them started during that time.

JF: Yes. And then we actually did that, exactly. And started some in, not only in different languages, [but] also in Spanish and in the Chinese languages, languages that were spoken, preliterate type programs. But I can remember the demand for classes being so great that we would begin a semester, and registration was set on such-and-such a day, and by 5:00 A.M., people were scaling the fences, literally scaling the fences to get a place in line to register for class. And that was shocking to all of us. You had demand and that desire to learn English.

*And then the other cultural problem, I think, began when we had actual*

physical fights between Mexican students and the Vietnamese students because of lines. The one culture, he stands in line and waits, and the other culture, lines are not a barrier. So you'd get a few people in line and all of a sudden, here would come another fifty of their friends, and they would just come into the line, and people in back of the line who had been waiting were angry. There would be yelling matches and shouting, and that kind of thing. It was tough.

CM: Evans was the first Los Angeles school that I visited. I had met one of the counselors at a CPGA (California Personnel and Guidance Association), whatever the counseling association was, so I went to visit her the next time I was down there. I was quite impressed with what all went on at Evans. Who was your principal there?

JF: *Ed Morton, who recently passed away, was the principal and also oversaw . . . . We got money. That was the last adult school built from the ground up in L.A. Unified. It was actually money, pre-Prop(osition) 13 dollars, that was in a tax, because it used to be funded differently, and just for facilities. And so the last of that money was used to build a new structure, which is now on the corner of Sunset and Figueroa, a four-level structure, I believe. I was in on the planning of that, and that was real exciting, because we had a chance to plan a building from the ground up. We had kind of a renowned L.A. architect, AC Martin (Partners), who is doing some interesting things now in L.A. They did the design of that.*

CM: Okay. All right. Asking you about the trends and issues of the seventies, and we've talked about the influx of the Southeast Asian people. Now, the seventies was also when adult a.d.a. (average daily attendance) became capped and a revenue limit was established.

JF: Right at the end of the seventies when Proposition 13 was passed – 1978 wasn't it? or '79? I forget. But right in there.

CM: Seventy eight.

JF: Prior to that, adult ed was funded with a ten cent property tax for operations and then a nickel property tax for actual capital outlay, so the money was coming in based on local property taxes. Then, with the passage of Prop 13, the whole funding shifted to the state, and then the state started a revenue limit system to fund education. At that time, adult ed was almost lost. Many of us remember that, when many people had to go to the California legislature just to save the program, because I think one of the proposals was to not fund it in order to have the state support it. So that was pretty scary at the time. I was at Evans still, and we closed down that summer. That's the only time I can recall . . . .

CM: I think throughout the state adult schools closed that summer.

JF: That whole summer, yes, because of the uncertainty. And then after summer, came back with a compromise where the ten mandated areas were established. And [those were] the things we could offer, and that was all, I guess, done by negotiation. So the mandated areas, heavily concentrating on basic skills and high school diploma and ESL, and so forth, and parent ed and older adults, leaving out the artsy-crafty type programs that had been so prominent in adult ed in the past and putting them as fee-based type programs.

CM: Do you remember, Jim, at a vice principal level – possibly not – but I know when they set up the mandated areas, and yet there was this kind of pot of adult ed money that had been earned from these other categories, the arts and the humanities, and

those kinds of things. And a lot of schools in the state, the districts let adult ed keep their historical funds, and then a lot of them didn't. They took the excess funds from the arts and the humanities, and those kinds of things, and rolled it into the regular program. Do you know whether Los Angeles got to . . . . See, because that first year, funds were kind of block granted to the districts.

JF: I really don't know that, other than we got started real quickly, so I'm just wondering if that money was used to restart the program. Because we were restarted in – I think I was called back in kind of mid-August, so it was pretty quick. We thought we were going to be down for a lot longer. But I'm not sure what happened to that source of money.

CM: Okay. All right. From Evans then, you went on to Roosevelt and became principal there. What new challenges did that have? And can you contrast a little bit the personalities of the schools?

JF: Oh, yes. First of all, I was not officially . . . . I was on the principal list – they had a list – and I was right up on top, number two, and that was kind of a good feeling. I was first appointed to Garfield – it was interesting – Adult School. The assistant superintendent at the time was (Dr. Robert) Rupert. Abe Friedman had just died in 1978, and Bob Rupert was the assistant superintendent. Called me in August sometime and said, "You're going to Garfield Adult School as principal." I was thrilled. I mean, I was thrilled. I had started teaching at Garfield in adult ed. That was my first assignment in that elementary school. It was a branch of Garfield Adult School, so I knew so many of the people. I got the accreditation book and then went on vacation, and then studied it and learned all I could about Garfield through the

accreditation book. Got home on Sunday night, and as L.A. Unified is so famous for (laughs), got a call from Bob Rupert at about nine o'clock saying, "You're going to Roosevelt tomorrow morning. You're not going to Garfield," after all of that.

(laughs) So that was a quick change. But it was wonderful.

CM: Where is Roosevelt located?

JF: Roosevelt's in Boyle Heights. It's the next school over from Garfield, so to me, it was – the neighborhood was so similar. But Roosevelt was a school that was – it's a very old school, kind of a community that had been in transition. You have a lot of older people who have been there for years who have maintained their homes, who are still there and will be there forever. And then you had a lot of immigrants coming in. But *all pretty much Mexican in the whole community. It's in Boyle Heights. And the school itself was – I think our ethnic breakdown was 99 percent Hispanic, and of those 99 percent, I think 95 percent were from Mexico originally.*

CM: Did the students – no. Los Angeles is too big for that to be true. I know in the smaller schools, the Mexican students tend to come from kind of the same area because they follow people that they know.

JF: Not there so much. I think they came from all over.

CM: But I would assume that Los Angeles had them from just everywhere.

JF: But it was a great . . . .

(tape off)

JF: The community in Roosevelt was an exciting community because it was kind of a *close-knit community. The service clubs were very close. I got involved with the Kiwanis and the local Chamber of Commerce. There were just some really*

outstanding people involved in that community who had been there for years. To this day, you can look around the city of L.A. and find Roosevelt High School graduates everywhere, a great influence in L.A. So it was just a prominent school going back many, many years.

And it was a community that had changed. Back in the forties, there was a big Jewish population over on Brooklyn Avenue and a large Japanese population. And then, of course, the war hurt that. And the Jewish population began to move west, and it ended up over time being pretty much a Mexican community. But during the war, because my father-in-law had gone to school there and I had so many family that had gone to school there, would tell me about the various ethnic groups [who] had all integrated and played together, and stuff, but that changed.

(end tape 1, side A; begin side B)

CM: This is tape one, side B of the James Figueroa interview. Okay. Anything else special about Roosevelt?

JF: I think to me it was a change, because I'd been in a basically ESL school with a full-time staff and full-time student body, a very young student body. Now I went into more of a part-time night school type program that was beyond ESL, that had all the mandated areas, and teachers who were often moonlighting from other jobs, and more of a family community. It was a change, not a big change, but it was more of a normal, I guess you'd say, adult ed type of a program over at Roosevelt.

CM: Trends and issues of the eighties. Now, certainly in the early eighties, the refugee population was still an important factor in our schools. But some other things came in there. And part of this kind of lops back into the seventies. But Los Angeles was an



early leader in the competency based adult education movement as well, and I know you had this one big project, the L.A. CAPS (Competency Achievement Packets). Did you have any involvement . . . What's the difference in L.A. CAPS and Diploma Plus?

JF: Well, Diploma Plus was basically what we were using. L.A. CAPS was not a big influence in our schools. It was really the Diploma Plus program. The theory was, you give people a high school diploma plus other kinds of skills, life skills, and recognize people for the life skills that they have acquired and give them credit for that, and that kind of thing. But that was kind of competency based also. I mean, on contract, and so forth.

CM: Absolutely.

JF: And that was really our *big* high school diploma program.

CM: And was that in place at Roosevelt?

JF: Yes. It was throughout the district. And that, again, came centrally, but it was developed over time with teacher committees and administrators involved, and that kind of thing.

CM: Okay. Now GAIN (*Greater Avenues for Independence*) came into play in the early eighties. Did that show up at Roosevelt?

JF: Not initially, because originally it was the old WIN program (Work Incentive Program) before GAIN, and that was run kind of separately. L.A. had an interesting setup in those days where federal programs were run almost independent of the regular program, and it caused a lot of dissatisfaction and it changed over time because it needed to change. But originally, the GAIN program and the WIN

program, they had centers around the district, and there was a separate group of teachers, separate group of administrators, even though it may have been in your own community. So we were not that involved in the eighties, early eighties.

CM: So those weren't integrated into the regular schools but had their own . . . .

JF: But it was changing fast because of the recognition that it needed to change.

CM: Okay. So you were at Evans five years?

JF: Seven years at Evans.

CM: Seven years at Evans and four . . . .

JF: There were four years at Roosevelt.

CM: And then you became Director of Adult Education for the district in 1984. Jim, one doesn't reach that level in a district the size of Los Angeles without a lot of support and grooming. You've mentioned different people, but I want to know if you had a particular mentor or two or three of them, or whatever. Who was your mentor in the district?

JF: I had more than one, but Bob Rumin was my main mentor. He was the supervisor of the ABE program.

CM: The one that brought you in full-time.

JF: The one that brought me in full-time, and really groomed me, really taught me. And his style with people was so good that I really wanted to emulate him and tried to, because he was just a people person who always listened to people and made decisions involving a lot of people and was not afraid to make decisions. I would say he was number one in my adult ed career as far as a mentor.

The people who got me launched, Luella Card, the principal at Garfield. And

then Eleanor Groves, who was the elementary principal at the time, who started the class there at the school with the parents. All three are deceased now, unfortunately.

CM: Did Bob always kind of stay at the district office as an instructional leader'?

JF: Yes. He moved on from ABE and got a broader role as Director of Instruction when we began to do that. That was a little bit later. That was after I was principal.

CM: I've always heard a lot about him, but I never did meet him.

JF: *It was interesting, because I was principal at Roosevelt and I'd been there for about --* I think I was in my fourth year, and I can remember him coming over one day and saying, "Bob Rupert's going to ask you a very important question." He wouldn't tell me what it was. He said, "But if the answer is yes, you had better be prepared to go all the way." I'm saying, "What are you talking about here? Wait a minute. I never thought I'd make principal in my life. Leave me alone." (chuckles) "I'm a happy camper here at Roosevelt." I could have stayed there the rest of my life. I was enjoying that community. I was loving it. I was enjoying being involved with the local service clubs and the teachers were wonderful. The support staff made me look great. The secretarial staff. I was in heaven. I didn't need to be moved anywhere. So that was a shock. And sure enough, within a couple of weeks, Bob Rupert said, "I'm coming over. We're going to dinner." And Bob was just all business and just no nonsense kind of person. So he picked me up, we went to dinner, we're sitting at dinner, and he says, "I have an opening. We're redoing the division, and I want you to be a director of adult education." I'm going, "What?" (laughs) I said, "Let me think about this." I thought about it one night, and that was about it.

CM: Was that a new position that was set up at that time?

JF: Yes. They reorganized the division. The board at that time was unhappy with adult ed, for whatever reasons, and with some of the leadership, so they moved some of the people out who were there and brought myself in as director of adult education and Loretta Walker as director of the ROC/P program, so we still maintained two major arms. The superintendent oversaw the adult ed and the ROC/P programs, but they were maintained separately with separate directors. So I was brought in to oversee the twenty-nine adult schools at the time and work with those staffs and principals. And that was a shock, obviously, because I just – I didn't feel ready. I was very young. I hadn't been a principal that long. So it was a big change.

CM: A little overwhelming at first?

JF: Yeah, a little overwhelming at first. A lot of things I didn't know. I didn't even know what ROC/P was, and I was in charge of it. So I had to learn the vocational end of the house. I hadn't been that heavily involved.

CM: I want to pick up on some of your . . . You mentioned Bob Rumin as being your primary mentor, but would you just kind of go through the other supervisors and district administrators up to that time. You've mentioned Abe Friedman, and you've mentioned Bob Rupert.

JF: When I came in, Bill (Dr. William) Johnston was the superintendent of adult education when I came full-time. He was a very strong individual. He had a lot of business support. He involved the business in a lot of the district activities and in adult ed, so adult ed had a real strong business presence. In fact, I can remember we had twenty-eight adult schools, and there was a person from the National Alliance of Business who was always at the principals' meetings. Bill Johnston provided him

with an office. He used to call him "old number twenty-nine," signifying the twenty-nine adult schools. That's how much he brought business into the adult ed program. So as a result, he had so much business support that when the superintendency of the district opened up in 1970, Bill Johnston was tapped for that job, so he became the district superintendent.

CM: And that's very unusual.

JF: Highly unusual.

CM: For someone from adult ed to move . . . .

JF: It shocked the district. I mean, people said, "How can you bring in this person who's only been in adult ed? He'd never even taught, which was kind of interesting. He came in as a counselor and he became an administrator – he was so ahead of everybody. He became an administrator so rapidly, and he was so good that he quickly moved in and then became superintendent in 1970.

He was the kind of person that – I can remember once, I was this young consultant, just twenty-nine, thirty years old, still learning, and I got in the elevator at the Board of Education, and here was Bill Johnston surrounded by business people. And his first question out of his mouth was, "What have *you* done for adult education today?" And you're sitting there, "Oh, my God." (both laugh) And everybody's listening. But that's the way he was. He challenged you all the time. He was just very good.

He became superintendent in 1970 of the district, and he went for ten years. It was ten tough years because his years as superintendent, even though they lasted ten, which is highly unusual, included the busing issue in L.A. Unified, the forced busing,

which just tore the district apart. He became a victim of that in 1980. But he served ten wonderful years.

CM: But it also covered Prop 13, which was such an upheaval for districts.

JF: Exactly. And so following him was Abe Friedman.

CM: I just wanted to mention something about Bill Johnston. I met him. He served on the Behr Commission that was doing the study between public school and community college adult education, and he was one of the adult ed representatives on that.

JF: He was one of the leaders that helped found the whole ROC/P system in the state of California, helped found our occupational centers in L.A. Unified, and helped with this whole setting up of the revenue limit system, as I understand. He was heavily involved with that. He was always in Sacramento, just a real strong presence.

Abe Friedman followed him [as assistant superintendent for the adult division] in 1970 and stayed till his death in 1977 or '78, I'm not quite sure. And Abe was a different style. He had been principal at the old Cambria, which became Evans later. And he was a people person. He was very soft spoken and just a very gentle person. And he had Bob Rupert as his director of adult education, and Bob was a tough "get it done" type, and Abe was kind of a little more laid back, just enjoyed himself. He died early. And he was followed quickly by Bob Rupert in 1978, and then Bob passed away in 1984.

CM: Way too early.

JF: Way too early. And that was a shock to me because he had just brought me into the central office as director of adult ed in August, and he passed away in December. So I didn't have much time to learn under him. In fact, he was even actually gone a

couple of months because he went in for bypass surgery, I think, in October and never did come back. So that was tough. And I was kind of left, Loretta Walker and myself, with this division.

CM: Without . . . .

JF: Without a superintendent.

CM: To train you.

JF: Right. And then we just went along and took turns going to the board meetings, and that kind of thing for about three months. And then finally in February, Gabe (Gabriel) Cortina, who had been a regional superintendent in L.A. Unified for the K to 12 system but had also been an adult school principal prior to that. He had been a skill center principal so knew adult ed and liked adult ed. He came out of the old WIN program, prior to GAIN. Became the assistant superintendent.

CM: You had mentioned that Abe Friedman was gentle and approached people and that Bob had a much more businesslike approach to his work. Can you just elaborate on these leadership styles of these men?

JF: Abe's favorite saying at our principal meetings was, "Take time to smell the flowers." He always reminded us of that. He said, "You're working. Take your vacations. There's a reason that somebody with wisdom gave you a couple of weeks vacation a year, and it's there to be taken. Do it. Look after your personal life in addition to your professional life." That's really the way he was.

I can remember one time that he was first appointed as assistant superintendent, and I think he was kind of overwhelmed. At that time ABE used to have meetings around the state, funded, and we went to Cypress, and we were in a

little hotel there. I made a presentation. And I was there with Bob Rumin. Abe came. And he wasn't involved with ABE, but he came just to kind of get away from the district a while and reflect. And he spent most of his time – I can remember this walking along the river right in Santa Cruz reflecting, smelling the flowers, and that kind of thing. That's the kind of person he was. He needed to get a perspective. But he was a wonderful leader, because you could talk to him. He was reasonable. You could adjust budgets and that kind of a thing with a good . . . .

CM: Sounds like inspirational also.

JF: Yeah. And he was real good with the Board of Ed because they had confidence in him. And so then he was followed by Bob Rupert. Bob was kind of a no-nonsense administrator, "let's get it done," very businesslike. His principal meetings were one, two, three, four, five, right down the list, and we followed an agenda, and boom, boom, boom, went by the . . . and got in and out.

CM: Were there time limits allowed for each item, each agenda item?

JF: Yeah. He was very good that way, very organized, and tough. He was tough. If you goofed, you got a call, and sometimes it was an angry call (chuckles). He'd let you know it. He was a lot tougher, perception-wise, I mean, you know, he had a soft spot. I learned that working the few months I did with him. He was harder to get close to. He was just that kind of individual. You had a hard time, because you always felt like you were going to be challenged.

CM: He was a very good public speaker.

JF: Yeah.

CM: He was your assistant superintendent [when] I came into adult ed in '77, and I think



he spoke at the first ACSA (Association of California School Administrators) conference that I went to, and I was just . . . .

JF: People used to look forward to his speeches because he would always have a lot of research involved. He had a Ph.D. from USC, and he included a lot of adult ed research. That was one of the things, I think, that was good about him for us as an administrator is that he always challenged us to read the literature, to be aware of the literature, to practice adult ed. He was just a believer in adult ed. He was such a strong believer in – make sure that you know that adults learn differently than children, and make those points, and be a leader for your community, and that kind of thing. He was very good that way. He was tough, but he was a wonderful leader.

And then he became nationally known because he became president of the old NAPCAE (National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education) for national adult ed, and he was on national boards. He spent a lot of time in Sacramento, probably more than the previous superintendents, because he became a real leader, I think, in the California adult ed community. He was up doing a lot of work in Sacramento for adult ed legislation, a lot of that.

CM: Which Los Angeles has always been very good at.

JF: Right.

CM: I mentioned that he spoke at the first ACSA conference that I attended, and I know when I got back, I called his office. I asked to speak to his secretary and asked her if she could get a copy of the speech he gave and send to me. And she said, "Just a minute. You can talk to him." Well, I didn't expect that at all. I mean, I was – but he was very gracious over the phone. I just told him I was new in adult ed, I'd heard his

speech, I wanted a copy of it. He said, "We'll get one right out to you."

JF: As tough as he was, people had tremendous respect for him, because they knew he was always in your corner, and he was for adult ed, and he was just a champion for adult ed. And so people admired and respected that.

CM: Did he – how do I want to put this? Did he let you do your job, or did he set out the parameters of what you were supposed to do? I mean, did he micromanage or did he . . . .

JF: No. He let you do your job. But if you . . . .

CM: Goofed.

JF: Yeah, you heard about it. Fortunately, I didn't goof too much I guess, so I didn't get *too many calls*. *(both laugh)* I mean, that was always the thing. If you got a call from Bob Rupert, you went to the phone trembling *(chuckles)* because you knew it was probably a . . . you know, chew you out.

CM: He didn't call to compliment very often *(chuckles)*.

JF: No, no *(chuckles)*.

CM: Okay. Now, you said that Gabe came from the WIN program and that he had been a skill center principal.

JF: Right, right. And then he moved on in the district and became a regional superintendent. And I think – I don't know how it all unfolded, but I guess there was no heir apparent in the district itself. I wasn't ready certainly. I'd only been there a couple of months. And Loretta the same way. And the district, at that time, there was a feeling – I think one of the things that happened with Bob that got him in a little bit of trouble with the board was, he was such a champion of adult ed. There

were some board members and senior staff who felt that adult ed should be doing more for the young people, high school students. So Bob said, "We're an adult ed program. Adult ed is for adults." So when he passed away, then the district kind of took that opportunity to bring in someone who was from the K to 12 system, who could carry out a mandate . . . .

CM: That they thought would be a little more open.

JF: Right. And that happened. That happened, certainly, and that was the beginnings of the concurrent ed program (refers to students attending both high school and adult school) and where the whole run-up in the whole state of California [started].

CM: (chuckles) I'm going to ask you about that a little later.

JF: Okay. (chuckles) We'll wait.

CM: Because it certainly came to a climax while you were in that job, yeah.

JF: Right, right.

CM: Now, when you became director of adult ed, you said you certainly weren't ready for it and you were left on your own pretty soon. Obviously, there's a big difference in being principal of a school and suddenly having twenty-six, twenty-eight, twenty-nine schools under you. Are there other things about starting that job that jump out at you now?

JF: I think just being overwhelmed with the paper, the need for knowledge, the lack of knowledge I had regarding our whole ROC/P arm of the division, which I needed to quickly learn. Having to cover the whole district versus covering one community was really a learning experience. So those were major changes in my life.

CM: Did you make major changes in the way the adult ed program was run?

- JF: Well, Gabe Cortina came in so quickly that he kind of took the lead, and major changes that took place then over the next three or four years while I was director were the whole concurrent program and an emphasis on that.
- CM: That actually came from him rather . . . .
- JF: Yeah, right. And probably also from the board, and so forth. So that was a big change for all of us, all adult ed, because there was a lot of resistance. We had all been schooled in adult education, and all of a sudden we're having to give services to high school juniors and seniors in our programs, and we had to quickly adapt. And we did. We did adapt to that. But it was different.
- CM: Okay. Other than the concurrent, were there other major trends or issues that came about while you were director?
- JF: I think the beginnings of the amnesty program, the whole development of the legislation for amnesty. We were involved with that. The actual implementation came a little later, but there was a couple of year period where the whole thing was unfolding where we were gathering information, gathering statistics, trying to influence legislation, tried to get an educational component into that amnesty law, which became successful.
- CM: So you were actually working with federal legislation.
- JF: Yes.
- CM: Okay.
- JF: And Gabe was at the lead at the time, so he did a lot of that too, and I was assisting him with that and following up. And then Gabe made another change, and it was a major change for both Loretta Walker and myself, because he reorganized the

division so that the director of adult ed and the director of ROC/P became director of instruction and director of operations. I became director of operations and Loretta Walker became director of instruction. But as director of operations, I had all the schools then. I had all the adult schools and the skill centers and the occupational centers, and I had the budgets. So it became a very powerful position.

CM: That's a big chunk.

JF: Yeah.

CM: But good training for when you moved on to become . . . .

JF: Exactly, because then I had to quickly learn the whole ROC/P system. And then I was responsible for actually administering the budgets of those, and that was tough because that was a whole – I hadn't learned it. And it was a powerful position because, you know, he who controls the money (chuckles), controls everything.

CM: Absolutely.

JF: And personnel. I also became responsible then for administrative assignments. Since I was director of operations and Loretta was director of instruction, I became the line person to assign principals to the schools. So, not only the money but the personnel, so that position was quickly elevated under Gabe.

CM: Absolutely. But as I say, good training for when you went on to become assistant superintendent. I always find it a pleasure to see someone who started in the classroom and then went right on up the ladder to become top administrator, and certainly the assistant superintendent of a district the size of Los Angeles is like a superintendent in most other large school districts. By the time you became assistant superintendent of the adult and career education, you had, undoubtedly – from your

experiences in all these other positions, by that time you'd undoubtedly developed a fairly well-defined philosophy of adult education. I'd like for you to tell us what it is and kind of how it came about.

JF: I'm a real strong believer in connecting a parent and a child's education, that we can dramatically increase the achievement of our kids if we educate the parents along with them and if there's some connection that takes place. So I think that's kind of my number one belief in adult ed, is an educated population is going to greatly affect our children. So if we can get parents – whether it's parent ed or ESL or just the skills necessary to help their kids, that it's going to have a great influence on our educational system. And to me, that's number one. Number two would be connecting the workplace with adult education, using our system as training for either entry level programs or upgrading . . . .

CM: Skills.

JF: And then getting companies to work with us in doing that. And that's really hard, but it's doable. It takes a lot of work. And then, I believe strongly in the mandated areas. I think there's another mandated area we could add that I have fought for that we haven't been successful with. But I think the mandated areas as they stand are strong. I believe strongly in parent education and lifelong learning so that older adults have an opportunity also to be educated, people with disabilities, all of the areas. But to me, it goes back, number one, to just an educated population and providing lifelong learning opportunities.

CM: You started by talking about the importance of the parent working with the children, and I believe some of that comes from personal experience on your part.

JF: My father came from Mexico, and he came during the revolution in one of the upheavals in Mexico in about 1917 when he was about eight years old. And he went on and actually went to school in L.A., went to Lincoln High School and got his diploma. But he was a reader, for whatever reason, I don't know. But I do remember him telling me a story that in 1933, the big earthquake in L.A., he was downtown L.A. entering the library at that time and he saw it shake. He used to tell me that story. But he would read to me, and I can remember our little house over in East L.A. and the little back room, and I can remember he would actually sit down and read Longfellow. For some reason, he was into Longfellow, and he loved it. I can remember to this day the *Song of Hiawatha* and my father reading that. And then he would talk about Mexican philosophers and poets, kind of gave me a pride in that. And he would often discuss them.

And then my mother, on the other hand, was a little more practical, so she got the old World War II books. I don't know if you remember the old Childcraft Series, the old orange books. And there was a whole series of books that parents were supposed to use with their kids, and my parents took that up. And my mother used to read from those books to me. So I can remember the old Giant Joe Bean. I still remember to this day a story that I loved, that I used to love to hear her read to me.

But them showing that interest. My father would always preach that it isn't the money, it's you being happy in your job. And it isn't how much you make, make a contribution in whatever you do. And be educated. So they pushed that. They didn't have any money. My father worked at a market after the war as a produce clerk but was very proud of it. I can remember him taking me to the old market and showing

me his displays of oranges and various vegetables and how he had them stacked up.

He was very proud of the work. So that was important. And they just instilled in me that kind of love of learning and a pride in what you're doing.

CM: Was your mother from Mexico also?

JF: My mother's mother was from Mexico. Her father was a southerner named Lee. He went to – he was a newspaper person in Juarez, Mexico. So he met my grandmother there. They married. And it was a little bit of scandal for the time because here was an Englishman marrying a Mexican, so we kind of got thrown out of the family for a while. But my mother was born in Arizona. There was a lot of back and forth in those days. El Paso, Juarez. They're so close that I have family still to this day on both sides of the border, Juarez, El Paso, all over the Southwest. So my mother lived in Tucson and then came to L.A. in the thirties, I believe.

CM: That would have also added to your understanding of working with the immigrant population.

JF: Oh, yes.

CM: Seeing it repeat and repeat and repeat in your classes.

JF: Yeah. I was lucky because I had parents who – although my mother only had a ninth grade education, nevertheless, there was a feeling that it was important, that education was important, and they showed it.

CM: And you said you thought that your dad had probably taken his citizenship classes from an adult school.

JF: He used to talk about that, and I tried to get some proof of it, but I think he took a citizenship class at Lincoln High School in the adult school at night and became an



American citizen with adult ed's push. (both laugh)

CM: Coming full circle here.

JF: Full circle.

CM: Jim, I've always said that the nice thing about being an administrator is that it gives you the opportunity to implement changes and bring in new programs that you think would improve the schools. How is the adult division in Los Angeles different today than it was when you became assistant superintendent?

JF: Uh, let's see. One of the things I think that is dramatically different is we're a full-time year-round operation as opposed to a part-time night school operation, and I think that's happened over the last few years. One of the things I'm most proud of is, when I became assistant superintendent, I think we had about a hundred and twenty-five full-time tenured adult ed teachers. When I left, there were over six hundred. And I really felt that the need for a full-time professional staff was going to make a great difference in the education we deliver. So that was a goal, and we worked at it year by year. And to this day, there's that many full-time people.

Another thing that we were able to do was get all of our staffs on year-round status so that it wasn't the September to June job where you had to work part-time in the summer. That's the way it was when I was assistant principal for a while. You'd get a fifteen or twenty hour week during the summer to work the summer school and then be off the rest of the time. But I was able to convince our superintendent and our board of ed that we needed full-time staffs. And so, we have all our administrators on year-round status, and all of our support staff are – the clerical staffs in the school. So that was something I really felt we needed in order to professionalize adult ed in

L.A.

Big changes that took place were the concurrent program. Obviously, that was a big one. But then that became very controversial and then ended up going the other way where it actually is de-emphasized now.

Another big change that I like to take credit for is, we had a goal of – and this goes back to the ABE days where we had those centers. I really felt that if every community in Los Angeles could have a full-time adult ed daytime center that would run day and night and just be unique to adult ed and only for adult ed, then we would really cover the district well. So that was one of our goals, and I didn't finish it, but we went a long way toward it. I think we probably have twenty-five or so centers now around L.A. that are full-time adult ed day centers, whether they're owned by adult ed or the district or whether they're leased out facilities, they're nevertheless full-time adult ed locations.

CM: So that each community adult school now does have some full-time operation.

JF: And that gives opportunities then for teachers to work full-time and gives students an opportunity to go and get a full spectrum of classes without having to go around – or having to go just at night. Because L.A. is – it's not different. I think most of the districts around the state have this problem in sharing facilities. Because when I came in, everything was pretty much shared with the high school, so the only time you could start your classes was when the high school ended. So basically, we were a night operation. To this day, that's still pretty much the case for half the program. But the other half of the program is our own full-time facilities that we can control with our own staffs.

CM: For the most part, your administration for each of the community adult schools is still co-located at a high school, isn't it?

JF: Ycs.

CM: I want to talk about some general aspects of your position. First of all – I probably should have picked this up when I asked you to set the framework. But Los Angeles is one of the oldest adult schools in the state. Do you know when it . . . We're always saying, "Okay. Adult ed started in San Francisco in 1856," blah, blah, blah. But I know I've seen like seventy-fifth and a hundredth anniversary reports [from Los Angeles].

JF: Yeah, we were a few years later. L.A. started, I think, in 1886. Don't put that down as permanent because I think it's somewhere in there. But it started out in a small – right down near Olvera Street, right in downtown L.A., and it was a small class. And guess what it was?

CM: Citizenship.

JF: Yeah, it was a literacy-type program teaching young men – at the time, there was an emphasis on men – teaching young men how to read and just basic skills. Started with one little class funded by the Board of Education. And just began to grow. And then the Board of Ed formally establishing the division, I think in about the twenties or so. It's a long history before the division actually was established and adult ed was recognized. And if you look back at the old board reports at the time when all of this was unfolding, there was a recognition early on that adult ed needed to have flexibility and needed to have facilities and needed teachers who understood adult ed learning theory. And there was all that recognition early on that adult ed was

different and it had to have classes in locations close to the people. It had to have times available for school when people could work around their work schedules. All of that was recognized way back, early on. And that's kind of a tribute to the leaders of the time, I think.

CM: Did you have a big hundredth anniversary celebration when you hit that?

JF: Yes. And we buried a time capsule.

CM: Oh, did you?

JF: Right at the Board of Education. That was my first year, so that – Let's see. My first year as assistant sup was 1988, so that must have been – I think it might have been a year off. But we buried a time capsule, had a big blowout at the Board of Education and had speakers and students, and that kind of thing.

CM: Okay. Jim, as a superintendent, certainly the higher up you go in a hierarchy, the more difficult it becomes to maintain contact. How much were you able to maintain direct contact with your schools? I was just trying to figure – you've got thirty-some-odd locations. Even if you made two site visits a week, you're not – (chuckles), you're barely going to get through them in a year. How did you handle . . .

JF: That was one of the hardest parts of the job, I think. What I tried to do was meet people in larger groups. We had regular principal meetings on a monthly basis, regular assistant principal meetings, regular counselor meetings, and I would always try to attend those and talk to them in a group and take questions and answers and just spent time listening to what was going on out there. I also established a teachers' kind of . . .

CM: Council, advisory, yeah.

JF: And we met periodically to also hear the needs of the division. I would try to go on a regular basis just to sit with faculties and just have a meeting with the faculty and just kind of listen, give them a few words and then listen to their concerns. So I would go around on a regular basis and meet with faculties. But whatever you do is not enough. It's just so big. And that's a real frustration. It really is. Because the communities are so different in Los Angeles that a faculty's needs in the Valley are different from South Central L.A., and the population's different. The teachers themselves are different, usually come from different parts of the community and have different orientation. So I can't really say I was real successful at that.

(chuckles)

CM: Well, at least you tried.

(end tape one, side B; begin tape two)

CM: This is tape two, side A of the James A. Figueroa interview. Jim, I want you to talk about finances in your district. Now, I know a lot of the smaller schools in the state have trouble, as I say, with the district office trying to capture some of their money, either through excessive indirect costs or whatever, rents on buildings. Does Los Angeles have that kind of financial problem with your district office, or do you pretty much control adult ed funds in the district?

JF: To L.A.'s credit, the division has always been able to maintain separateness with our funds. In my experience, we've never had any attempt to raid our funds. In fact, it's been the opposite. We have actually been successful in getting some of our schools funded out of the general fund. We've also been successful when COLAs (cost of living adjustment) were different in the K to 12 system and were a lot greater than in

the adult ed system, and then the district would have a salary raise based on the higher COLA, and I made a couple of successful arguments that you couldn't do it, and we actually had our pay raise absorbed by the general fund. So it was actually the opposite when the general fund was supporting us.

CM: Good for you!

JF: And I think it has a lot to do with confidence in adult ed and the feeling at the board that there is a need for adult education and a real connection with the kids. We worked hard at that for a long time, and so we are successful. For example, we got a new Watts skill center. It's Maxine Waters Employment Prep(aration) Center that is on the books right now being planned, and that's going to be totally funded out of K to 12 bond money that was used for the regular schools. And the last big bond issue that was passed, the adult ed system was included in the disbursement of those moneys. So we have made a lot of progress, and again, in my experience, there hasn't been any attempt to take adult ed money the other way. The only one would be the lottery. I would say that's a source of . . . .

CM: Do you get your lottery money?

JF: No, and that was established day one. And every attempt that I made, and I made it a yearly attempt to try to get the lottery money back into our division. We made good progress, and then right at the end, when I would . . . . "Let's do it next year." And next year never came. (chuckles)

CM: Well, certainly, it almost makes up for it to be included in the bond issue for facilities.

JF: Exactly.

CM: Still kind of on finances, Jim. When you draw up an annual budget, how far down

does that percolate? Do your principals have much budget input or control?

JF: Each school is given an allocation every year of what's called teacher hours. So if you're a school, you may get a hundred thousand teacher hours to work with, and then you can divide that as principal whatever way you want. You might have twenty thirty-hour teachers; you might have fifteen five-hour teachers; and then you can spread it around the community whatever way you want based on that allocation. The allocation is kind of a store. It's just building a little bit each year, with shifts over time to accommodate population changes. So what we did in recent years was, as growth money came in, tried to put the growth money in the areas of the community that were growing. So in South Central L.A., which, for example, would be an area where there's been a dramatic shift and the population has become a heavy immigrant population, so to try to put greater resources into those schools in that area has been the recent goal. The Valley is another example where there's been a dramatic shift, also with a heavy immigrant population coming into certain areas of the Valley. So we're trying to boost those schools up with additional teacher hours.

Then the principals get an allocation of instructional materials, which is based on a.d.a. (average daily attendance), so it's so much per a.d.a. That's kind of the norm system. Our administrators are kind of a norm system also where for every so many units of a.d.a. you get an assistant principal. And then everybody gets a principal, and everybody gets an assistant principal of counseling. Clerical staff is also determined by norm, so for every so many units of a.d.a., you get a clerical person. I think it's a lot of flexibility, because federal funds buy you extra, and there's a lot of flexibility for the principals.

What I was trying to do before I left, which was going to be tough to do and take a long time, is to give the principals their budget in dollars and then let them shape the program. So that the teacher hours – a hundred thousand teacher hours might represent four million dollars, for example. And then they would have to buy their teacher services out of that pot. So that's something that's a goal, I think, long term is that each school gets a dollar figure rather than a . . . .

CM: Rather than a resource figure.

JF: Yeah. But at the same time then -- see, there comes the responsibility because if you get a dollar figure and you buy too much support and not enough classroom time, then you erode your a.d.a., and then you're not earning the a.d.a.. And the hard thing about it is that the state funds L.A. Unified on one a.d.a. base, not individual schools, so individual schools then, you have to get . . . . How are they going to have the responsibility to make sure that L.A. Unified meets its cap? And that's been a lifelong problem in L.A. Unified ever since the revenue limit and the cap system was established, is getting schools to recognize that they have this targeted cap.

CM: This obligation to generate so much attendance.

JF: Yeah, right. If you give them more flexibility, which we've done, and they buy too much support services, which has happened in a couple of schools, and our directors and myself have to come in and make those hard changes, *help* them make those hard changes. (both laugh) And that, I think, has been one of my biggest challenges in the last few years, because we're struggling to make cap, and to get people then to recognize that we may have to put more into the classroom services and a little less in the counseling or clerical assistance or security, or whatever. It's a tough sell. It's a



real tough sell. Because you need the other stuff too.

CM: And of course, in good economic times, our attendance always goes down.

JF: Yeah, see, and that's what's happening over the last three or four years, struggling to make cap. Now, in a couple of years it will be the opposite and then it won't be a problem, but everything goes in cycles.

CM: You had mentioned something about getting a new facility from the bond issue that the district had. Can you talk just a little bit about your facilities? How many of the schools are free-standing, like Evans for example? I know most of them are combined with high schools, and then you have community locations. But just sort of elaborate on your facilities.

JF: And I'll talk about the adult school facility versus the ROC/P because those are all free-standing. The adult schools still have a base or home base at a high school where they run a large evening program, at the high school. But most of them now have opened a day center where, in some places, actually, the administrative offices have relocated. And all of them, with the exception of Evans . . . I shouldn't say all of them. Two-thirds of them are lease-type facilities, so they're expensive. That's a big cost in L.A., the cost of leasing adult ed facilities, because obviously lease costs in a big city are pretty high. But an actual number, I don't have on the tip of my tongue right now, but there are over twenty of those type facilities around the district that are full-time, large cadre of teachers, full-time teachers and administrative staff, full service running from eight in the morning till ten at night.

CM: Okay. I'd like for you to address the role of professional organizations and which ones are active within your district, and so on.

JF: Well, CCAE (California Council for Adult Education), certainly, I think is the number one organization because it's the full-service organization for adult ed, and it includes teachers and support staff and administrators. It's the only organization, really, that has all of the . . . .

CM: Everyone.

JF: . . . everyone involved and included. So we made a big attempt to help that organization grow by doing a couple things. One is, we co-sponsor with CCAE twice a year a big staff development day on a Saturday, and we use one of the high school adult ed facilities and have all the ten mandated areas, all the instructional supervisors, and have workshops and guest speakers all day long. And they're very successful. The last few have had a thousand teachers on their own, not being paid, on a Saturday come in to access staff development, staff training.

CM: That's bigger than the state conference.

JF: Yes, it is, exactly. Exactly.

CM: Is that what you call your Tenacious Teachers' [Day]?

JF: Tenacious Teachers. One of those. I forget the other one.

CM: Oh, you have another name for the other . . . ?

JF: There's two, yeah. But the Tenacious Teacher Conference, I think that's in the fall.

CM: I love the name.

JF: And people can meet by subject areas. All the adult ed senior teachers meet together, and the parent ed teachers all meet together. But that's one way. And then, everybody knows CCAE has been responsible for that. And then CCAE has a couple of large dinners every year where they have recognition. And that has been a

tremendous growth, also, for CCAE because the recognition of individuals has grown dramatically, giving out certificates and plaques. And they have one for classified staff where we have a recognition, and CCAE sponsors that, and people actually nominate people and then schools bring their classified staffs with them and recognize an individual. Then they have a teacher recognition dinner and a retirees' recognition. All of those recognitions, I think, help build the organization. So we've grown, actually. I think when I took over, the number was three hundred or so, and over time it got up to about a thousand members, I believe. It's the largest in the state now. It surpassed the other sections, the L.A. section.

CM: That's great. And your district is a section in itself, isn't it?

JF: Yes, right. The L.A. Metro (Chapter of CCAE).

CM: Not part of the . . . .

JF: Right. And then, encouraging people to be involved. I've always had the philosophy that if we . . . . There's a way to influence things in the state, and it doesn't have to be pound your kind of thinking down everybody's throat. It's more get people involved and working together, and then through our involvement, we'll have some influence on what's going on in the state. So we've tried to have people become officers of the state organization, allowing them to go to conferences, allowing them to be involved in the organization, and encouraging them to be involved. So I think it's made a difference.

CM: Now, is your local administrators' group very active? I mean, do they . . . ?

JF: Yeah. There's an actual Association of Adult Administrators in L.A., and the adult ed division administrators are a part of that. [That, in turn, is part of the district's

administrative organization.] But they have a system with a board of directors, and the adult ed representative is a full partner in that administrator's organization. It's part of the board of directors.

CM: Now, is that administrative organization, is it a sub-group of ACSA, or is it . . . ?

JF: No.

CM: It's strictly . . . .

JF: It's strictly on its own. ACSA's not as big in L.A., probably, as it should be, because of this – people having to pay dues twice to two organizations. So ACSA does give a discounted rate.

CM: And ACSA dues are expensive.

JF: Yeah. But they give a discounted rate to L.A., recognizing that the administrators have this other obligation to the other organization. And then, the other organization represents them, so ACSA doesn't have to have that burden of representing people when there's personnel disputes. The local [organization] represents people with those kind of things. So it's a big strong organization. And of course, UTLA (United Teachers of Los Angeles), which is a teachers' organization, has a big adult ed presence also.

CM: Well, that's actually a union, isn't it?

JF: That's a union. United Teachers of Los Angeles.

CM: Are the negotiations for the [adult] teachers through UTLA, are they separate from the district negotiations, or are they all part of the big negotiations?

JF: They're all part of the big one except there's a subcommittee established that meets on a monthly basis with UTLA adult ed people to flush out problems that are unique to

adult education. But they're limited to non-monetary . . . .

CM: Things like retirement credit for part-time teachers (chuckles).

JF: Exactly, yeah. And problems in schools. But the big monetary issues are settled at the large table, which the adult ed people are included in with the union. But their union structure also recognizes the adult ed teachers with a full partnership on their board of directors and a full representative that they have elected. So I would meet once a month with those elected leaders and our two directors and try to flush out problems, of which there is a lot. (both laugh)

CM: Certainly, the district, the adult division, has given leadership at the national level as well. You've hosted a couple national conferences. Were you involved in those conferences?

JF: Yes. Actually, the one in nineteen . . . .

CM: I think it was '82 and '92.

JF: Yeah, '82. Ninety-two I was heavily involved because I was assistant superintendent. Lanny Nelms was the national chair, and Lanny's obviously highly involved in organizations, all the various organizations, and highly successful. I depended on Lanny a lot. He did a wonderful job of organizing that conference. So yes, we were heavily involved. We had dozens of people in various committees and leadership roles in that conference. Went back to '82 also. That was up in Anaheim also, and Bob Rupert was assistant superintendent at that time. And it was a little different in that the '82 conference was pretty much run locally by local – whatever organization locally was running it at that time. That's the way the organization did their national conferences. The local committee really had the total burden on them, so Bob Rupert

had a cadre of dozens of people. I remember I was committee chair for the exhibits. I was principal of Roosevelt at the time. The recent conference, I think the national organization had professional people doing more of the work, and it helped relieve the local group from a lot of that day-to-day tedious duty.

CM: That '82 conference, which was, I think, the last year that NAPCAE existed before it was folded into AAACE (American Association of Adult and Continuing Education). Was that the year that Bob was president?

JF: I'm not sure.

CM: Anyway, he was president of that organization.

JF: Yes, he was president of NAPCAE one of those years, and he was also on the board of directors.

CM: And you've had periodic presidents of the state organization, CCAE.

JF: Yes, correct. And that's very we have a president coming up next year in Jan Brittain, who will be president of CCAE.

CM: And Lanny Nelms just a few years ago. And he, of course, has remained active as legislative, I think, chair for that. And let's not leave out your two members to the Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) board.

JF: Oh, yes. That organization, I guess, is changing.

CM: Yes, it is separated from AAACE.

JF: So how that ends up will be interesting.

CM: Anyway, it was Lupe (Guadalupe) Reyes and Aryola Taylor that served on the COABE board. And when Lupe was on the board, she had one of your students design the logo for COABE.

JF: That's right.

CM: So that came out of your district, one of your computer classes. Jim, I have visited at least a dozen of your adult schools, possibly more. And I've always been impressed by the diversity of your staff and how they reflect the community in which the schools are located, and I know those things don't just happen. They take planning. So I'd like for you to talk about this diversity in both your staff and your student body and the things that you did to promote it.

JF: That's a long hard road, because I think as the community changes, the workforce of L.A.'s changing, and you see it in the police department, you see it in the general teaching population of the district, and it's becoming more and more in adult ed. I think adult ed, we had a little bit of an advantage because we have a base of community folks who do represent the ethnic groups who are able to be credentialed and have been encouraged to come into the system. So that's one way, is identifying community folks who can teach and become part of it. Another way, we've tried to encourage our teacher assistants to go on and get . . . .

CM: Credentials.

JF: Yeah, since most of the teacher assistants came from the community, many of them even former students. Helping them get credentialed, then that brings a group that better reflects the total diversity of L.A. One little technique we used was, we had a recognition of teachers in adult education who were former students. We identified, I think, about forty-five people, and we took them in front of the Board of Education on television and said, "This student at Evans Adult School started in ESL I and now he's teaching over here at this location," and that kind of public marketing technique

really helps people get interested in that.

But I think the principals in L.A. are very sensitive to diversity and getting people who do reflect the community. It's still a problem. There's no question. I mean, there just aren't enough people with the degrees among the various minority communities available to teach. And it's becoming tougher because as salaries go up and opportunities – and K to 12, the competition for full-time people is a lot tougher. So that's a problem that I think is going on now.

But nevertheless, there's been a great growth, I think, in the statistics. And as well as the administrators. And it's a natural thing. It's kind of interesting. I tracked the statistics for a while, the number of women and minority administrators, and over my tenure it's grown dramatically. But I don't take all of the credit for that necessarily. I think it's just a natural changing of the workforce in that area. When I took over as superintendent, I think there were only four women principals, and when I left, almost – I had a goal of 50 percent, and I got pretty close. I think there are about 46 percent women principals in L.A. Unified now, adult ed principals.

CM: Well, that's certainly going on. You mentioned earlier that at one time Evans had – what did you say, eighty-six different languages?

JF: Eighty-six.

CM: Do the numbers still hover right around there for the different language groups in the district?

JF: Yeah. I think there are even more language groups now in L.A. Unified. I think there was over a hundred at the last count. Probably not as many at Evans as there were because the group tends to be more Latino now.



CM: It's gone back to the . . . .

JF: It's gone back, yeah. And then the big F1 foreign student population is gone.

CM: Visa program is gone.

JF: Pretty much, yeah.

CM: Well, as you've mentioned, as the community changes, your labor pool changes, and that has contributed to it. So certainly the diversity in your schools and staff reflect the diversity of Los Angeles, and that diversity shows up in a number of ways, including political factions within the community. One of your jobs was to work with all of those different factions. I want to know if you could comment on the political aspects and demands of your job.

JF: That was one of the toughest parts of the job. (tape off) The Board of Ed is divided by geographical regions, so there are seven of them. And of course, they look after their local schools, so satisfying that demand is one part of the job, making sure that services are kind of equally distributed across the district, while at the same time, allowing pockets where growth is occurring to receive extra. And that's hard for people to understand. One of the hardest things has been when you have a new facility in one part of the community, that local board member's happy. Six others are saying, "What about me?" And then trying to explain, yes, that is a goal. We'll get to your district soon. But we can't do it all at once, and somebody has to make the hard decision as to where this is going, where this money is going. And that causes a lot of push-pull in our board. And so, it's a matter of trying to build confidence in the board, in your decision, and that you are making a fair decision, and that it's eventually going to go across the district. That's one of the hardest things.

An example would be East Los Angeles Skill Center and the Maxine Waters Skill Center in Watts. Everything that was given to one or the other, the other community said, "We're getting shorted." And they would call board members, and they would call [the] superintendent, and I would be meeting with those communities trying to say – give them a rationale for why this happened here and not in your place. That's really tough because L.A. has just so many diverse communities that to try to sit down with every one and satisfy their needs is impossible given our financial system. So you have to try to give enough and give people enough confidence that we are doing something for the greater good of the city and not just always looking after one unique community.

The City Council in L.A. is divided into fifteen, and the way it's developed over time – this is a criticism, I think, of L.A. City Council – is that City Council persons do look after their unique communities, and they have a system of divvying up money so that all fifteen get the same resources regardless of need. And that, again, is being recognized as evidence of change. Some communities have greater needs than others. So that kind of translates over – you get a lot of pressure also from the city when you do things in one part of the district or another. But the City Council people are involved in adult ed and they hear about something and they want to have that for their community too, so that's another pressure, not as great as from the board but certainly from the City Council, city government.

CM: There's also the community based organizations (CBOs) that in one sense want to run their own classes and in another sense want to access services from the public agencies. Certainly, those that are . . . . We've seen at the state level the influence of

some of the Hispanic community based organizations in the Hispanic caucus in the legislature. And it looks like you're going to have a Latino mayor for the first time.

JF: It looks that way, doesn't it? (both chuckle) [Antonio Villagarosa was not elected.]

CM: I mean, unfortunately, even within that Hispanic community, it's not a unified community, so I would assume that that would further complicate things for you.

JF: It does, yeah. I mean, you have recent immigrants, and then you have the other side of the spectrum, people who have been in this country for many, many years, and the conservative versus liberal philosophy, older thinking versus the newer thinking. And it does complicate it. The community based organizations do a wonderful job of serving what they're supposed to serve and helping immigrants out of poverty, helping them get citizenship, and certainly that's their role. And sometimes spilling over into our areas. And it causes a little conflict. We in L.A. haven't really had some of the conflicts that they've had around the state. We've been able to work pretty well with them.

CM: Well, the needs are so great . . .

JF: Exactly.

CM: . . . that you could double the service agencies and not . . .

JF: Yeah. An example would be the Urban League over in the Crenshaw, South Central area of L.A. where we've been able to put adult ed classes into the Urban League, and they were getting some high-end money from Toyota for a training center. Some people thought that should be adult ed getting that money. And it could have happened. But then, by building the partnership and us providing the entry level . . .

CM: The expertise for instruction.

JF: Yeah, which we're good at, and providing the basic skills training, which people need before they become advanced mechanics anyway. Working that kind of partnership has been what we've tried to do. We've done that over time with some of the other immigrant type organizations, Mexican American Opportunities Foundation, for example, MAOF, classes together with them and using them as one of our own branch locations and working partnerships. Because again, the needs are so great that if we each recognize what we do best and work at that . . . Unfortunately, that also takes both sides thinking alike and trying to do something for the greater good versus getting all the money into the one pocket or the other. And that's hard. Sharing responsibilities, sharing dollars, sharing the workload -- and the glory -- is tough, is tough, particularly when community based organizations need that glory sometimes for their own continuance. We don't need it as much because we're legislated. It causes conflicts.

CM: Do you have a district-wide advisory committee, or do each of the schools have their own, or both?

JF: Each school has its own. That's something I thought about a long time and didn't do, for whatever reason, and I think it's something to really consider, a district-wide advisory. Except then you get the same thing.

CM: You would get the same thing, yeah.

JF: The North Hollywoods versus the San Pedros versus the East L.A.s. and people not understanding each other's committees. So I don't know. You can argue both ways.

CM: About what percentage of your time was spent working on these community relations?

- JF: Oh, it varied, peaks and valleys. But overall, I think, probably 15, 20 percent, somewhere in that area.
- CM: The Los Angeles adult program makes up 20, 25 percent of the entire state's adult education population. So not much happens at the state level without it having a major impact on your program, and vice versa. I know when I was interviewing Ray (Dr. Raymond) Eberhard, the director of the adult ed unit, and I asked him who his primary advisors were, he said any time anything new came down the road, he made three phone calls: one to the director of Los Angeles and then one to each of the two major professional organizations. So I would like for you to discuss this relationship with the adult education unit of CDE (California Department of Education) and the kind of input that you had into each other's operations.
- JF: Oh, they were certainly there for support and for direction and leadership and policy and that kind of thing. So we've always depended on the department for that and tried to establish a working relationship where we could kind of come to consensus, I guess you'd say, by involving other districts and not just using L.A.'s own interests. I've always believed in this adult ed system as a state system, and we all need to work together to come to agreements and compromises and establish policy. I've always felt the working relationship with L.A. Unified, at least in my experience, was strong and respectful of each other and respectful of each other's positions. We had our conflicts, no question.

But I think there's a give and take where . . . . An example would be the small districts that need to establish an a.d.a., and L.A. supported that. [We] could have said, "We'll take it all for ourselves," and could have pounded that thinking, but

there's a greater need here around the state, and I think it's recognized. I think it becomes hard when you try to do that and then people shoot at you and take away your resources, because the needs in L.A. are no less. They're still there. So the need is for everybody to grow, not just for us to take from each other from a limited pot, which happens so much in a limited budget. So I think by being involved with policy groups, as the assistant superintendent of L.A., by being involved with the department in the various advisories and that kind of thing, we can establish this partnership that gives a voice to everybody.

CM: That's mutually beneficial.

JF: Right.

CM: Now, we've made references earlier to the concurrent students, but it did become quite a problem, as you mentioned, and led to some new legislation. L.A. has always provided leadership with the legislature because you have lobbyists. So I've got a two-pronged thing here. I want you to talk about the problem with the concurrent students, and then I want you to talk about the legislation and how your lobbying efforts helped bring about the resolution of that problem.

JF: The concurrent program, I think what happened was it grew so fast that it just sent signals up and down the state to policy makers that weren't ready for the big bill. I think it hit hardest that first couple of years when L.A. Unified's concurrent program grew so fast, and all of a sudden, the reimbursement wasn't there in the state budget, so people at the state level had to look at it.

CM: We probably need to say, Jim, why the concurrent bill was big, the reimbursement rate.

JF: At that time, there was a cap on adult ed, but there was no cap on programs for concurrently enrolled adults, and the reimbursement was the same as K to 12 revenue limit. So you could start a concurrent program and get paid according to what the district was getting paid for its K to 12 program, and there was no limit on the numbers. So some districts grew dramatically and ended up with half their program being programs for kids.

We, because we're so big, recognized that early and put restrictions on ourselves. And so what we developed was a strong policy statement, approved by the board, that concurrent programs were only for students in high school who had fallen behind and needed an adult ed class to graduate on time or to catch up with their class or to get a job skill or a work skill. So we deliberately, deliberately avoided any programs that were considered fringe-type programs that might have helped high schools with their arts programs or crafts programs, or anything like that, deliberately avoided that and went just into the actual academic-type programs. We avoided ESL too, because that – we just felt we should give to credit programs. So that limited our program even though it was giant. And now they're unified by number because there are so many high schools. The actual percentage of our total was pretty low compared to some other districts. But again, because we then were going around the state with our policy and sharing it with other districts, other districts began to pick it up.

Then it grew so fast statewide that it caused an alarm that this thing was just a way for high schools to get away from their responsibility. And that seemed to be the prevailing thinking in the legislature, that adult ed was doing something that high

schools should be doing. That was their job and we were picking up their job. And we tried to make the point that our teaching was different. We treated students differently. It was a whole different system. So they were being successful because they were in a different system, not some of the same old stuff they'd been getting all the time. And we had statistics, we had studies to prove that, that students in the programs were graduating at a greater rate because they came through adult ed programs and that it was working. But the arguments weren't strong enough. And then it became very emotional over time. It just became very – some districts were doing things that were kind of fringe, and then they began to be . . . .

CM: That's always the case.

JF: And then the whole program began to be painted that way, that this was just a – all these abuses were being touted around the state by various policy makers, and so that hurt us a lot, I think. I think if we had stuck to the programs as we originally intended, as a system, that it might not have gotten that out of hand. And if some districts hadn't gone so far. But the law allowed it. I mean, it was nothing wrong. Kids were being helped and kids were graduating. So then, legislation began to be discussed, reform legislation that put limits on the percentage of kids you can have in the program. It took the revenue limit and blended it in with the adult revenue limit so that you got a lower rate.

CM: To take away incentive for those that were just serving concurrent for the money.

JF: And included it in your cap so that it was one cap, but did give you the higher cap based on the number of kids you were serving. So some districts got bumped up quite a bit in their cap. So that reform did take place, and L.A. Unified was, with its



lobbyists, trying to assist in the development of the legislation and come up with something reasonable. And it seemed to be reasonable.

CM: Now, you actually have a lobbyist that just works with adult ed, don't you? Is Trusse just adult ed, or is he district-wide?

JF: No, he's just adult ed.

CM: And what's his last name?

JF: Norris, N-o-r-r-i-s. L.A. Unified has an office in Sacramento with a couple of lobbyists full-time, plus contract lobbyists that they use. And then adult ed, we have one person full-time just for adult ed legislation, and that's Trusse Norris.

CM: Is he still there?

JF: Yes.

CM: So you – and by you, I mean you and Trusse and others in the district – actually had a lot to do with the writing of that legislation, didn't you?

JF: Yes. We were involved with that. Although I think the department did most of that from what I understand, the Department of Education, coming up with the ideas, I think, of trying to get some limits on what we could do to keep the program and recognize that it's a valuable program, but at the same time, make it reasonable fiscally.

CM: And that same legislation set up funds for new schools?

JF: Yeah. That was the 1991 reform, which established start-up money for districts to start up programs, although a small number, but at least it was some recognition that there was needs around the state not being met and that needed to be started.

(end tape 2, side A; begin side B)

CM: This is tape two, side B of the James Figueroa interview. Okay. We were talking about legislation and your relationship with the department. And you've worked very closely with all of that over a number of years. Do you have any general recommendations to improve adult education in the state? I mean, if you could wave a magic wand, what would you like to see happen?

JF: If I could wave a magic wand? Number one, working hard to get local boards to realize the value of adult education on the education of their mainstream programs. I really think that should be a major goal of adult educators in the state. Market your programs, try to show the link between the educated parent and the educated child, try to establish it. We need some more research. We need some way to formalize how valuable this is. The Family Literacy Program, certainly in L.A., has had a very successful run, but it's very expensive. You have smaller classes, you have to have teacher assistants, and you have to have a time with children and the parents to sit together. But somehow getting local districts to realize the value of adult ed. And that's a tough sell.

CM: To see board members looking at themselves as representatives of the adult population rather than just the kid program.

JF: Exactly, right. And superintendents. And other senior staff. And high school principals. I mean, there's still that competition that goes on . . . .

CM: You can't use my blackboard. (chuckles)

JF: Yeah. It's one of the dumbest things going, but it's like from time immemorial, this hasn't changed. (chuckles) It's interesting how that is. But that's one area certainly to recommend. The other area would be establishing greater links with the business

communities of cities. Some districts have done a wonderful job of involving business in adult ed type vocational programs. I think more of that. I think more of selling ourselves that we're able to sit down in partnership with businesses and provide an educated population. Some of the things are going to need some legislative changes. I think this idea that we can't take adult ed classes into businesses needs to be looked at. There's a space problem in our schools and rents are very high. Many businesses would be happy to have an adult ed class in their business, and some of them even would release employees, but because it's not perceived to be open to the public, it's not allowed in our current system. So I think that needs to be looked at.

*I think we need to look at another mandated area, and that's the whole area of foreign language. Unfortunately, every time we try to advance that, it gets knocked down, but with communities so diverse in this state, the need for people to communicate with each other – knowing another person's language would go a long way toward helping communities work better together. There's groups of parents, I know, that have come to me in South Central L.A., black parents, who said, "We would like to take Spanish to learn because we have this changing community and we would like to be able to integrate them into our community. If we knew a little Spanish, it would help a lot. They're learning English, we want to learn Spanish. Why can't we learn Spanish?" "Well, we have to charge you a fee now." "Well, how come they get ESL for free and we can't get Spanish for free?" "Well, you could if you take it as a high school diploma." "No, we don't want it as a high school diploma. I already have a high school diploma. I just want to learn to communicate*

in this community." And we can't do it. So I think that whole area of foreign language -- not to travel. If a person wants to go to . . .

CM: But leave off the travel, yes.

JF: Forget it. But for workplace, just the idea of -- it's a scary thing when you go to a hospital and you don't speak the language, and the person on the other end doesn't know your language. If they knew a little bit, sometimes lives could be saved. So I think that whole area needs to be looked at also.

What else? Obviously, the dollar thing. If we could somehow wave a magic wand and get a recognition that the cost of our programs go up as costs of K to 12 programs go up, and yet adult ed only gets minimal COLAs. The K to 12 system has gotten so many extra dollars to pay its teachers more, and yet we've had to raise salary levels in some cases to keep up, and so that causes programs to erode and services to erode. So that needs to be looked at.

CM: Yeah, that's a whole thing, the legislature considering adult ed a categorical program rather than a delivery system.

JF: Yeah. The other thing is teacher training. I don't understand the thinking that does not allow our teachers in adult ed to get staff development days like the K to 12 system does. What kind of thinking says our people don't need to be trained? I don't understand that. With the society changing so fast, adult ed teachers need to have time to learn their profession and to keep up with changes, and they're not being allowed to. But I don't understand the line of thinking that prevents that, why the finance people always come out against that when that comes out as part of a law or a change. We tried that law change a couple of times and it's failed, but hopefully, keep

putting it on the table. I noticed that one of the law changes this year is to allow the ROC/P teachers to get what the K to 12 teachers get.

CM: In staff development.

JF: Staff development. So maybe that will . . . .

CM: Well, maybe adult ed will be next.

JF: Hopefully. Staff development is so important. That was one of my major goals, to get that passed when I was there. And we were unable to do that.

CM: Jim, you mentioned working more closely with businesses, and somehow I skipped over this. I had it back earlier in my notes. You mentioned that Bill Johnston was very good at working with businesses. And at the time you said that, I was thinking you certainly picked up on that, because I know that you've done a lot of work with private employers. So let's go back and talk just a little bit about your vocational training in ROP programs and the work that you've done with businesses.

JF: When I took over as superintendent, I was just such a novice when it came to the ROC/P program that I had to quickly learn. So one of the things we did was . . . . This was right after the riots in L.A. and Rebuild L.A. was formed. And then there was a movement in L.A. called Workforce L.A. to try to develop the workforce of L.A. in various areas, targeted areas. An organization was formed, and we actually supported the organization by providing a couple of full-time staff members. The community colleges kicked in also, and the L.A. County Office of Education. So we formed this group, and we had a board of directors of various business leaders around Los Angeles. And it was very successful. And they would meet on a regular basis and identify areas of need for training and actually got to the point of sitting down in

certain targeted areas and developing curriculum, and that kind of thing. So that was one area I think we can just keep on working on.

Businesses are willing, very often, to come in and help out. One of the things, at the East L.A. Skills Center, there's a large business in Southern California called Al and Ed's, and it's a mobile electronics -- putting all these fancy systems in cars. And that's changing so rapidly. He couldn't get enough employees, so we sat down with him, and he said, "What I'm willing to do is support -- if you start a training program, I'll support you with materials and supplies and I'll hire your graduates." And in exchange, we hired a couple of his top people as teachers and sat down and actually wrote a curriculum that was acceptable to that industry, the mobile electronics industry. And then they ended up getting Kenwood and Sony and other electronics companies in as an advisor. And the program's going. It's throughout the skill centers in L.A. Students get hired into various electronics type programs. But it was just one of those things where we sat down and just detailed and got people to work on it, developing a curriculum that was acceptable to that industry and that they needed.

So you have to do that with other industries also. We've worked with Kaiser Permanente in providing programs where Kaiser paid the district, and we've actually done audits at the site as to the needs of Kaiser Permanente in language training, and that kind of thing, and used people to actually develop curriculum side by side.

We've done the same for McDonald's, believe it or not. We've contracted McDonald's to help train their employees, whatever little training it took. (chuckles)

CM: To recognize the picture. (chuckles)

JF: Yeah.

CM: *The hospitality industry is another big one that could use something like that, if they would.*

JF: Yeah. Small manufacturing is still a very big thing in the area. *Large manufacturing, maybe not so much, but small. And that's an area that's hard to tap into because they're sometimes small businesses without a lot of employee needs, but you have to put them together kind of in a consortium and work with that industry. L.A., of course, the big one is the whole industry of movies and theater.*

CM: Entertainment, yeah.

JF: The entertainment industry. So that's kind of what Workforce L.A. is concentrating on now. They have DreamWorks, set up programs with DreamWorks and Warners Brothers, and so forth, where students can learn various entry level type trades and get into those areas.

CM: Okay. So this Workforce L.A. is still an active, viable group.

JF: Yes, right. Exactly.

CM: Needs to be replicated throughout the state, that's for sure.

JF: The other problem with the skill centers and occupational centers is keeping up, keeping up with changing industry. And that's always been a big problem. I remember one of the first things I did when I was appointed superintendent was walk over to the – it was the Watts Skill Center at the time. I can remember going through that skill center and looking at the machinery and actually getting almost a panic attack, because I said to myself, how are we ever going to get the money to upgrade? This stuff's so outdated. There's no way it's fair for students to train on these kinds of

things, and there's no way we're going to ever be able to get our whole system throughout L.A. and keep it up with the state-of-the-art changes and all that. And thank God for federal vocational education dollars that came into the district and helped upgrade a lot of the equipment over time. And I think there's a bill even this year to recognize that one time infusion of equipment in those ROC/P programs around the state. Because it changes so fast and you just can't keep up, so you have to involve business to help you with that.

CM: To keep current on . . . .

JF: The businesses have to have confidence that people coming out of your training centers are going to be good employees, so that takes every . . . . We have advisory councils in L.A. for that where there are trade advisory councils that sit down and talk about those kind of problems and help solve them. Every occupational skills center has its own local advisory council involving local business.

CM: Jim, through the years, there have been various things. You mentioned WIN and then certainly GAIN, the welfare reform. And what is it, WIA (Workforce Investment Act) now?

JF: Yeah, I think so.

CM: Have they helped with your delivery of training? I mean, how have those programs meshed with your skill training?

JF: What we've done over time is integrate them into the regular occupational and skill centers so that students can go to a GAIN program at an occupational or skill center, but the other students can also access those training programs.

CM: So they're just integrated into your other classes.



JF: Right. The JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act) problem taught us a lot, I think, where it was so restrictive and so bureaucratic. You spent so much of your money just keeping track of progress of students, and there wasn't a lot going into the classroom because so much was spent in . . . .

CM: Record keeping.

JF: Yeah, and giving them what they needed at the bureaucratic level. So that became a real mess. I can remember arguing with city people over that. So many – everybody was monitoring everybody. (chuckles) You spent your money on monitors.

CM: Jim, that raises the question – because a lot of people feel – or certainly initially felt that the increased accountability for both the federal and now the state programs as well, that the paperwork is a real burden, and yet there's a real need for accountability.

JF: Right.

CM: Can you talk about that?

JF: In my last year, I think, we did an analysis of what we would truly need out of our grants to satisfy the paper requirements. And we were going to have to spend like two million dollars out of a six million dollar or so grant just on people . . . .

CM: So about 30 percent.

JF: Yeah, just on people to collect the paper, do the testing, and all that. The [data] needed, I don't know but it seems to me there should be a way to – I mean, with research so good now, why do we need to do 100 percent of the population when they're so transient anyway? Why not do targeted research groups? The big problem we had in L.A. – I don't even know if it's solved now, I don't think so – is, say you're a student and you come in to school in East L.A. and you take your pre-test there.

Then you go over to a school in Venice, which happens all the time. People are just in a constant state of movement. We had a tracking system to track that student from school A to school B. So the student enrolls in school B, now gets pre-tested again *and doesn't get credit for the growth they had in school A, from school A to school B.* That's lost. So that was a real problem in a big city like L.A. We did finally get a centralized computer system, but I don't know if it's really . . . .

CM: Functioning as well as it should yet.

JF: Yeah. And then, you have to get your teachers to do this. How can they do that?

When you have an open enrollment system and you have hundreds of people coming all the time – how to test them at the initial point and then the follow-up points – it's a major problem and it just seems to me a real burden. And one of the big revolts we had was right at Evans Adult School. Teachers refused to do it. And they said you're taking – and they had a number of hours, I forget what they were.

CM: Too many.

JF: You're taking it out of our instruction and we cannot complete our curriculum in the prescribed time because we're doing these other activities. It's taking away from the instructional time with the students. And these were legitimate complaints and concerns that I don't think have been solved. I think it was thrust on us too fast and it *just wasn't thought out carefully enough.*

CM: You mentioned the targeted research, and that's something that I thought for a long time, that if we could really put enough money in to do like a three-year longitudinal study on a group, take that as our baseline – and it would take lots of money to do a three-year longitudinal study because we know how we lose our students. But take

that as our baseline. Then you could take samplings and come out with just enough.

No, I certainly agree with you on that.

JF: A reasonable sampling to me is . . . . It's accepted everywhere else in the world. Why not?

CM: Okay. Jim, you and your schools have received many awards and honors over the years. Speaking of that, I notice some very interesting pictures on your wall, so I want you – before we talk more specifically, I want you to tell me about your picture with Barbara Bush. And then you have separate pictures with the two Clintons.

JF: I don't know. In this day and age, I may want to take the Clintons down. (both laugh) No, that was just – Bill Clinton was campaigning and came over to one of our skill centers in South Central L.A., and they had a little reception, and I had a chance to meet him, and he was so personable. What they say about him making eye contact is really true. He just looks at you and makes you feel like you're the most important person in the world. It's kind of interesting. And, yeah, I had a photo opportunity so I did get a chance to – both he and Hillary were there. And then I had a separate picture with Hillary when she came to our Puente Learning Center over at Boyle Heights out of Roosevelt. It's a community based organization where we actually have a big adult ed program and kind of share the responsibility of the costs. So she was there to honor the center, and we had a chance there for photos.

CM: Well, that's very nice.

JF: Nothing special. (chuckles)

CM: And what about Barbara Bush?

JF: Barbara Bush came to Garfield Adult School when we had a big family literacy

presentation, and she came to actually give an award for family literacy. And that was kind of special that she did target that school as a leader in that area. You know, she's been involved in the literacy movement for years.

CM: For a long time. Now, was she First Lady when she was there?

JF: No, I believe this is . . .

CM: Later.

JF: . . . like a year or two later.

CM: I know that you got the U.S. Secretary of Education award for Outstanding Adult Education and Literacy Program and that that focused on your family literacy. Was that the same thing or are those two separate occurrences?

JF: Those are two separate occurrences. The other one came a little later. One of our students was selected as Student of the Year, and that was kind of nice, in the area of family literacy. He was a young single male parent who had done a lot in family literacy with his child. They went to the same school, by the way, over at Garfield Adult School. So we were honored as a district, and we had a chance to go to Washington and meet Secretary of Education (Richard) Riley and receive this Secretary's Award.

CM: Very good. Now, do you want to go into a little more detail about your family literacy? You've kind of talked throughout about the importance of parents and children, but you've obviously been recognized a number of times for your Family Literacy Program.

JF: We've tried to start family literacy centers around Los Angeles, giving a chance for parents to go to school with their children and spend a little time learning side by side

and recognizing that the influence on the child is going to have a great influence on their education. So we have a number of family literacy centers. We've been able to get private support for a number of them in terms of actually building structures, physical facilities. There's a foundation in L.A. that's very interested in family literacy that has given support. We've tried to grow the program. Because again of the funding issue, this is one of the areas where we tried and failed to get recognition that the child is a cost in that program, and so we have to give them a little bit of money. So we tried to get a half a.d.a. for the kids in the program, and of course, that was denied. But it was only recognition that if you're going to run a program with twenty to twenty-five adults, you can kind of support your a.d.a., but with family literacy, you have to run them smaller. So you might have fifteen parents, and you might have twenty-two kids, and that's a lot of people, but you're only getting paid for the fifteen parents. And then, on top of the cost of the teacher, you need teacher assistants or aides for those kids when the parents are learning separate, to work with the kids. So there was a recognition of the additional cost of the program, but so far, anyway, we haven't been able to get it.

CM: So you've used primarily foundation grant writing, that kind of thing.

JF: Yeah. And regular a.d.a. money.

CM: To pick up the excess costs on that.

JF: Right.

CM: Has the CBET – I'm not even sure I know what those initials stand for.

JF: Community Based Educational – what is it, tutoring? [Community Based English Tutoring]

CM: Probably. Yeah, that's probably what it is. Can you use those funds with your family literacy people?

JF: Yes. That's very much encouraged. So you can use those funds to also help pay for the cost of aides, child care, and that kind of thing.

CM: To work with the children.

JF: The difference in CBET is the parent, or the person, has to pledge to tutor the child. Well, in family literacy, that's part of the whole thing anyway. So it's a natural. It really is.

CM: They meshed in quite well. Okay. Other than the Secretary's Award, I want to mention that you received a national award from AAACE as outstanding administrator.

JF: That was really kind of a highlight, it really was, to see that, to be recognized nationally for work – I'm very proud of that.

CM: Yes, absolutely. Okay. Back to some kind of particulars here. The amnesty program, which started in the late eighties but certainly spilled over into the nineties, had a major impact throughout California, but perhaps particularly in Los Angeles. So I'd like for you to talk about how your district responded, and then as a follow up to the amnesty program, I think you expanded your what was already a citizenship program. *But if you could address those and what all they included and what services you provided.*

JF: We actually, in anticipation of the law, began the amnesty program before the money was available. And the law had been passed. We knew it was coming. But there was no funding source yet, so we were able to convince our board that we should start the

program. The need is so great and people do need to get into those amnesty programs so they can get their citizenship, and so forth, that we were allowed to start classes. So we started classes. I mean, it was just unbelievable the response of the schools. Dozens, hundreds of classes were started almost overnight, almost overnight. We had a staff that developed a curriculum and made sure it had met the requirements of the law. Teachers were hired. Classes started in all kinds of locations throughout Los Angeles. And literally thousands of people signed up overnight and were in those programs.

So suddenly we're into a system that's been created now with a curriculum that was very good, and videos and everything else, and we're delivering this educational service. And all of a sudden, we realize that the general adult ed population is growing, and we began to realize that people were being exposed to education, they were getting some taste of it, they were being successful. They were forced to go to school at first and then a little bit of education leads to a little more. And then family and friends started to come along, and before you knew it, the whole adult ed population was growing. It expanded quite a bit. So we were way over cap, which is kind of interesting. We were over cap so much – two to three thousand units, I think – that we didn't get paid for it. But we felt they were going to be there later on. So it was very successful. We like to take credit for eighty thousand new citizens in L.A.

CM: That's wonderful.

JF: Yeah, we like to take credit for that. Based on the number of students we know went through the program, actually filed their applications and went through the process full-time.

CM: And you had a full-service citizenship program. I mean, you provided everything, the applications, fingerprints, photographs.

JF: We actually were doing that. We were doing the photographs, fingerprinting, helping them fill out the forms, getting them to the *Immigration Department*. We even worked out where the *Immigration Department* came onto school campuses and set up testing centers. We actually worked that out also, which was a big departure for them.

CM: This was after they closed down the private testing?

JF: It was during that time.

CM: Yeah. It was through the citizenship testing that I actually visited a lot of your schools, because I would do monitoring visits on citizenship testing.

JF: We became a testing center for the state, or for the *Immigration Department*. One of the things that happened early on, which was a real struggle, was, we began the program early before regulations were established, and we set some general guidelines that we knew were going to be in the regulations. Well then, when the actual regulations were written, some of them were more restrictive than what we had been doing. Then we had a federal audit, and there was an attempt to take away great amounts of money because some of the restrictions didn't match what we were doing early on. So that early money we were spending, they tried to take that back. Had a major, major disagreement, and we were allowed to do a sampling. It was kind of interesting. That's when sampling, I believe, worked. We did a sampling of all our schools, and we came out okay, and we didn't have to pay any money back. But it was touch and go for a while.



CM: Was it with the amnesty program or was it earlier with the refugees – I know at one point you were running classes twenty-four hours a day.

JF: Yeah, that was part of amnesty. We actually had classes going from 2:00 A.M. to 4:00 A.M. at Evans Adult School, and people actually going to class. It was just amazing.

CM: And I understand that it was because of people's different shifts that they worked that they were able to . . . .

JF: Well, you know, downtown L.A., people work – there's a lot of hotels there. People get off maybe at midnight. They're still a little bit awake, so they were willing to go to school for a couple hours. The problem was getting teachers. (both laugh) So it didn't last as long as it could have. (both laugh) Not too many teachers want to teach from 2:00 A.M. to 4:00 A.M.

CM: Did you give bonus pay?

JF: No. We should have probably. (both laugh)

CM: That might have helped.

JF: Imagine getting an administrator to hang around too. (both laugh) We started Saturday programs, Sunday programs. That was the other interesting thing.

CM: Your district's also been a real leader in distance learning programs. I think you did your first ESL videos at the time of the refugees.

JF: Yeah.

CM: And started broadcasting and have gone on since then. Now, you've done video series in a number of the mandated areas, the authorized areas of instruction. Can you fill us in on that?

JF: Basically ESL. We've tried to do different ESL levels, and then the one recent one was trying to get job skills worked into the various ESL levels, and that was a whole series. So we did spend a lot of money on that. Tried to get some recognition but didn't, as far as financial from the state, for what we were producing. Until recently, with the money that's come through . . . .

CM: The 5 percent money (refers to the amount of an adult school's income that can be spent on alternative methods of instruction).

JF: Yeah.

CM: We'll go into that in just a minute. Now, I have seen – I thought they were just delightful – you also did some videos for parenting.

JF: Yes. In English and Spanish.

CM: I know the program I saw just had a delightful child trying to get dressed to go to school and coming out looking like a scarecrow.

JF: Then again, that's another way to make the value of adult ed to the rest of the district. Those videos can be used in elementary schools by parent groups, and so forth, and just makes your own adult ed system seem as a bigger part of the total district.

CM: And I heard, although I haven't seen them, that you did some videos for your citizenship program as well.

JF: Yes. We have a whole citizenship series.

CM: That's what I thought.

JF: I can't remember how many it is, but we did use money for that. And they're high cost items. You have to hire professional actors. We tried it with just a regular teacher, but they're not actors. Actors following a script seem to work better.

CM: Now, I know these videos, they're broadcast.

JF: Mm-hmm.

CM: They're used as supplemental work in classrooms.

JF: Right.

CM: And I think you actually started the video checkout before the 5 percent programs came in, is that correct?

JF: Yes. That's true, yeah. And so we had all the videos, just mass numbers in every school, and students could check them out. But it really began to work with the 5 percent money.

CM: And again, I think that your district provided real leadership in obtaining that 5 percent money. So I'd like for you to talk about what we mean by the 5 percent programs and how that's mushroomed through the state now.

JF: Well, the 5 percent was money that you could use out of your [state appropriations], in alternative methods of instruction, and what that means is it's kind of flexible, according to the district. Everybody does something different. We chose to use ours in distance learning, which meant that we could earn 5 percent of our a.d.a. in distance learning, but we had to have some guidelines on how to earn that money. It wasn't just take 5 percent and spend it. So we had a system developed where we developed a system of videos and put it on our local television station that L.A. Unified owns, and we had it on weekends and also at various times during the day. So that was one way people could access it. Another way was to actually go to the school and check out the videos, which most students ended up doing, rather than watching it on television. And that way they could watch it at their own leisure. We

developed pre- and post-testing to show that there was growth. We developed the student *had* to come to school to get started and had to come for testing so that there was some accountability there. And we actually did do some studies on the growth, and the studies showed that students did grow, their language levels did grow by going through the program.

We targeted students who basically couldn't go to school on a regular basis because of work schedules or child care schedules and people who were just kind of maybe afraid to go out at night because the communities aren't safe in some areas of the city, and just couldn't go to an adult school in the evening and would rather stay home, but still could access some education. So it's an alternative form. It's not anything that's going to be better than a teacher. But it's going to give a person a chance to grow.

And what's happened is, people who maybe started a class and then had an interruption in their lives could continue having some education and then come back later. More and more, I think, as we grow and learn about adult ed, we're finding out that's what our students do. They don't drop out. They just interrupt it. They kind of come later. They can't come on a regular basis. People's work schedules are all over the place. People have to work when they can work in order to put food on the table, and if you give them some alternative ways to access education, it's going to help the community in the long run. And that was kind of our philosophy at distance learning.

CM: And I think that this video checkout that you pioneered is the most common form that these 5 percent programs have taken on. I know there are some others. There are a few districts that check out laptop computers for people to take home. But I think

that by far the bulk of them are just video checkout systems, and everyone seems to be very happy with it.

JF: It would be interesting if they can get the 5 percent increased. I think there's a movement to do that.

CM: To try to do that, to get it up to ten or seven and a half.

JF: Something more reasonable. Again, the Department of Finance seems to be in the way.

CM: They're afraid.

JF: But what I don't understand is, our university systems throughout the nation are using distance learning. I don't understand why not adult ed. Community colleges are doing distance learning. High schools are now beginning to do it. So why the fear of adult ed? Other than a mistrust.

CM: They can't get out of, somehow, this idea of seat time. It's just really silly. And then more recently . . . Well, okay. You did these first video series, and whether they were used as a pattern, but the thing of it is is that your ESL video series was the first that was out there. And of course, they've gone on – this commercial production now, the *Crossroads Café* that California helped finance – designed for distance learning. And then that was followed up with another citizenship one. So you've been in on the ground floor of all of that. And more recently, that was recognized by your getting a federal grant in the Cyberstep project. Can you tell us just a little bit about Cyberstep?

JF: That's a partnership.

CM: Yes.

JF: And our responsibility in L.A. Unified is going to be to actually create ESL videos, and the other partners are going to provide CD Roms and print materials, I guess, and curriculum. It's evolved over time since I've left, so I'm not sure of the current partners. You've got the [Sacramento County] Office of Education in Sacramento, I believe. There was a literacy group.

CM: The literacy group is from New York.

JF: And they were involved.

CM: And then the projects – well, I mean, Cyberstep was set up as a separate project. OTAN (Outreach and Technical Assistance Network) is involved in that as well.

JF: And that's one of the problems adult ed has in dealing with the K to 12 system. You enter into this kind of thing, so now you need some people to do it. Well, your district may have a freeze on new people or something like that because of fiscal [concerns]. So you go to them and try and explain. It's a real dilemma all the time because you're always kind of going against the grain and saying, "I need people to do this. We've been funded for it. It's a major recognition that our district was selected to be a partner in this major undertaking that's going to have nationwide kind of exposure." And fighting your districts through bureaucratic freeze, or whatever happens to be on at the time.

CM: One of the unique things about the videos that you're doing now in ESL is that they're built around story lines, so there are four videos that, put together, tell a certain kind of story. And I think twenty is the total that you're doing on that.

JF: One of the hard things in this video series is balancing education, sound educational practices with entertainment. That's a real tough one, because it can get so boring if

you go one way, and then you're not educational if you go the other way. So try to get a balance in there. Try to keep them lively, entertaining, a little bit of Hollywood, and at the same time instructionally sound. I know that people I had working on it originally were kind of a little on the artsy glitzy side versus – so we had to get people in who were bringing them back to reality as far as sound educational practices. And that's hard.

CM: And of course, the print materials that go along with it, certainly the follow-up exercises and the comprehension checks and the activities to use the language, and so on. And do you know about dissemination?

JF: Not yet.

CM: Not yet, okay. Because I think that's going to get out to all the state directors, and then hopefully they'll disseminate within their own states.

(end tape two, side B; begin tape three)

CM: This is tape three, side A of the James Figueroa interview. Jim, in reviewing your time as head of the Los Angeles adult program, what do you consider to be your major accomplishments? I'm sure we've touched on those, but just if you were going to pick out your major accomplishments.

JF: I think one thing I'm very proud of is the professionalism of the adult ed staff in Los Angeles, increasing the number of full-time tenured adult ed teachers by quadruple, and I'm very proud of that. Another area is providing year-round assignments for the administrators and the support staff, recognizing that adult ed is a year-round program, and we need to provide programs when students need them, not based on some artificial time line. So getting that to happen was a big step because we got that

separate from the K to 12 principals, and there was a lot of feeling as to how come adult ed's getting this and not the rest of the world. But we were successful in that.

I think providing a lot of full-time adult ed centers around Los Angeles is a major feeling that I have of accomplishment. The fact that we have so many centers now where you can go and take a full-time adult ed program in a unique site for adult education. I feel good about the confidence, I think, that the board of ed and our senior staff had during my tenure with adult ed. We were able to do a lot of things without a lot of oversight just because the feeling was we were going to do it right and we were going to do it quickly. I think the amnesty program gave that feeling to the board that we were able to respond . . . .

CM: You were really serving the community.

JF: Yeah, and able to respond and respond fast and change fast. And just keeping that feeling of change. I think recently it was even said at a Board of Education meeting when the district was deciding on CBET money, and I was there and testifying and making a case for adult education and how we were going to spend it, and one board member said, "If adult ed's handling the money, I'm happy because I know they're going to handle it right, and they're going to do it right, and they're going to do it with the best interest of the people at heart." So I felt good about that.

CM: That's very gratifying.

JF: Yes, it was. To hear a board member saying that. Just that confidence built up over time about our system and that we are an integral part. And that's another thing I feel very gratified about is that I really feel that adult ed in L.A. is a strong part of the district's total delivery system. It's not just anymore K to 12. It's really pre-K through



adult. And it's said all the time now. It took a lot of years to get them to say that and include adult ed in everything. Then we had a recent superintendent who came from adult education, who I used to share an office with (chuckles) back in the old days, Ruben Zacarias. That really helped a lot, his tenure there, and [also] the fact that we had a Board of Education member elected who was a former adult ed principal, George Kiriya. And they were both there at the same time. That helped, I think, increase the stature of adult ed in L.A. Unified.

CM: I visited George's school.

JF: Did you?

CM: When he was the principal. Yeah. Very impressive man. And you say Ruben Zacarias also had some adult ed . . . .

JF: Yeah. Ruben – this was back in 1971 when there were demonstration grants under ABE, and we had two demonstration grants. One was the Asian Project where curriculum was developed for various Asian cultures, ESL curriculums. And Sadai Iwataki – I don't know if you remember her – was head of that. And then we had what was called the Florence Firestone project, which was an attempt in the Florence Firestone area of southeast L.A. to connect parents with kids. And what it was, was a curriculum developed that was the language of the school to help ESL students learn and feel comfortable with the language of an elementary school, with going to an elementary school. And there were actually lessons developed on how to talk to a principal, how to talk to a counselor, how to talk to a teacher, how to help your kid with homework. And Ruben Zacarias was selected as the leader of this project, and then he went on to become superintendent of schools of L.A. Unified.

CM: So you've actually had two superintendents that had adult ed background.

JF: That's right.

CM: Maybe you should have stuck around a few more years, Jim. You could have been superintendent of the district. (both laugh)

JF: Thank you but no thanks. (both laugh) I realize my limitations.

CM: Nothing is ever completely smooth. What have your major frustrations with the job been?

JF: I think trying to satisfy all of the various communities of Los Angeles. It's impossible, it's frustrating, and if you really want to do it – which I really do – it's such a hard thing to make those decisions, those tough decisions. There are communities in L.A. that need more adult ed, that need facilities, so spreading that adult ed a.d.a. across the district in a fair way is very hard, a hard thing.

Another frustration has been – and this was fairly recent – working with the teachers union and getting them to understand some of the limitations adult ed has. There's a recent movement to make everything more K to 12 because teachers want the benefits, and they have them, and the salary. But they also want some of the other things that in adult ed we can't do, because that's not our system. Our system has to be flexible, has to be able to change, has to be able to open and close classes as students are there or not there. And teachers wanting the security and a sense of staying in the same place all the time kind of comes up against our system. So that's a frustration.

CM: That's reality.

JF: Yeah.

CM: You mentioned that you were pleased with being able to develop a core of full-time professional staff, and that's what we need. We need that combination of core full-time staff and yet the flexibility that the part-timers . . . .

JF: Right. So things like preparation time for teachers, they were unable to give to those full-time people. Some districts have worked it out, but then they don't pay the same salary that L.A. Unified does, and we all get the same revenue limit around the state. I think that's a real frustration also, the revenue limit being so inadequate and a city like L.A. being so expensive that you can't do what other communities can do on the same amount of dollars.

CM: What a small community in the central valley can do, or a medium-sized adult school, I should say, in the central valley.

JF: Yeah. When you're paying so much to rent space in downtown L.A., or anywhere in L.A., it's frustrating. One of the ways that L.A. Unified has been able to survive through the years is an unfortunate way, and that is the large ESL class size. We're paying over forty dollars an hour now on this revenue limit, but you have these big ESL classes that are fairly low cost. Well, that's changing rapidly. The population is not as intense as it was, numbers are going down, so your class size is a little smaller. The needs now are greater as far as technology and so forth.

CM: And you don't have those large classes to balance out the expense of the other classes.

JF: That's exactly right. So the long term future of paying these higher rates is a worry to me, although I'm not there. It's still a worry. How are we going to do it? It seems to me we need to look at another method of funding adult ed, and maybe it's an outdated method. This seat time thing, every hour you're there, in the long run, may kill us. I

don't know what the alternative is, to be honest. (chuckles)

CM: Okay. I think we ought to mention, Jim, that the Figueros have been an adult education family. Give us just a thumbnail sketch of your wife Adriana's career.

JF: It's kind of fun because we (chuckles) – believe it or not, there's a direct correlation with my moving and her moving [within the district]. Before we were married, I was – I should tell you this, I was widowed in 1982 right in the middle of being a principal at Roosevelt. That gave me a great – what's the word? – admiration for people who have to raise kids on their own, because I was working basically from one to ten at night, and I had three kids at home. And that was tough for a couple of years. And then Adriana came into my life in 1984, and we got married, and that has been wonderful ever since.

But before that, she was previously married, stay-at-home mom, who had taught in Alhambra High School for a while. (tape off) So she had taught in Alhambra High School and then left teaching for a while while she was raising her children. Bob Rumin called me in to be his consultant in 1969, which I did. And then in 1974 when Abe Friedman asked me to be assistant principal, that created an opening in this consultant job I had with Bob Rumin. So the person that took the consultant job was the coordinator over at Mid City Adult Basic Ed Center, which is kind of one of our premier ABE centers in L.A., and Joan Ririe moved into my old position as consultant. So that created an opening as his coordinator at the site. Well, the reading teacher, who was Serena Arakawa at the time, who is now Serena MacMillan – both of them, by the way, became adult ed principals – moved into the coordinator job. Well now that created a reading teacher opening, and guess who had

applied to go back to work on a part-time basis, was Adriana. So my moving on, and then she got hired as the reading teacher by Bob Rumin. So there we are. I'm married and all of that; she's married. And so we just went on our merry way for a number of years.

And then I became principal in 1980, and my becoming principal created an assistant principal opening, so Joan Ririe moved in as assistant principal – not at the same school but moved on from this adult basic ed job. Serena at the same time became my assistant principal at Roosevelt – she was ready to move on – which created a coordinator's job at this ABE center. So Adriana moved into the coordinator's job. So my moving again triggered her moving. So we went on our merry way, and then before you know it, we were married in 1984, which caused some interesting problems, because here I am now the director of adult ed, she's the coordinator of this local site. And she goes on, gets her administrator credential and is kind of ready to move up the ranks. And that was fine. Except I'm in charge now of appointing the administrators, and my wife's an administrator-to-be. So what do we do to avoid nepotism and all those other accusations? So we talked about it a long time, and she decided that maybe it's best that [she] leave the district. And I think, looking back, that was the best decision we made because later on in L.A. Unified there was a lot of things made about administrators and their spouses, and all that kind of stuff, in the local newspapers. So then she went and interviewed with Bob Benbow over in Baldwin Park and became his assistant director [and] retired as assistant director from Baldwin Park. So it's been great because we had a lot of things to talk about at night, obviously.

CM: And the careers have been lock step even though they weren't necessarily together.

JF: Right. What's so interesting, if you look back at our past lives, it's almost like a meant-to-be, because she went to the same high school that my first wife went to, but I never knew her back in high school – Adriana. I was across the street in the boys' high school and she was in the girls' high school over in Montebello. I was in the boys', but I never knew her. But her sister was in my first wife's class. Then when we got married, we find out later, that she was married in the same church I was, one week apart in the same year, same month. And then, we end up each with three kids. Our daughters were born on the same day. A lot of parallels. A lot of parallels. So we end up together putting this Brady Bunch together, which we did pretty good. We had six kids. We didn't put them all in the house at the same time. But they all get along great to this day. It's a great family, and our six kids and six grandkids are all like one. They don't distinguish between what side of the family they're from. So we're lucky.

CM: That's great, Jim. One thing about being married to another adult educator. You never had to explain to each other about these night hours that you kept working.  
(chuckles)

JF: That's for sure. And it was nice because we got a chance to go to some of the same conferences together, and that's always been kind of nice.

CM: Well, we're going to wind up here, Jim. I know we went through your major accomplishments. Now, they may or may not be the same, but if there's anything else that you want to talk about as to what gave you the most satisfaction, if it's different from what we've listed as accomplishments.

JF: Whenever I got frustrated, depressed, angry, whatever, I would go to a school and talk to students, and that would always bring me home. This is why we're here, sitting at a graduation, listening to those stories, that makes it all worth it. It really does. And that's why I'm so happy to have been in adult ed. I'm so happy for a system that's given me a career in adult ed for all these years. It's just been very beautiful. Plus I got a wonderful wife out of the deal. (both laugh)

CM: Yes! Okay. Well, you certainly had an exemplary career, Jim.

JF: Thank you.

CM: And I want to thank you, both for the interview and for the contributions that you've made to California's adult education programs. This interview as completed as a part of the California Adult Education Oral History Project.

END OF INTERVIEW

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## James A. Figueroa

### SUMMARY

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Assistant Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District's Division of Adult and Career Education (retired), the nation's largest public school adult education system. The District spans 708 square miles. The Division of Adult and Career Education (DACE) annually serves 400,000 adult and young adult students in 26 community adult schools, 10 occupational and skills centers, and the regional occupational program. Responsibility includes overseeing a total of 3500 full time teachers and 1500 support personnel. Classes are available in over 700 branch locations throughout the District. Adult and career education programs offer 650 different course titles in areas such as: Adult Basic Education, Adult Literacy, Amnesty Preparation/Citizenship, Apprenticeship, Distance Learning Options/Multi-Media, Diploma Plus (Academic Program), English as a Second Language (ESL), Parenting and Family Life Education, Programs for Older Adults, Public Services Education, Vocational Education, Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL), and Youth Services Academies.

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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1988 – 2000	Assistant Superintendent, Division of Adult and Career Education, Los Angeles Unified School District
1984 – 1988	Director, Adult Education, Division of Adult and Occupational Education
1980 – 1984	Principal, Roosevelt Community Adult School
1974 – 1980	Assistant Principal, Evans Community Adult School
1969 – 1974	Instructional Consultant, Adult Basic Education Office, Division of Adult and Occupational Education
1963 – 1969	Elementary Teacher, Harrison Elementary School, Teacher, English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Education, Los Angeles Unified School District

### EDUCATION

**Masters of Arts - 1970**  
California State University, Los Angeles, CA

**Bachelors of Arts - 1963**  
California State University, Los Angeles, CA

**Associate of Arts - 1961**  
East Los Angeles College, Los Angeles, CA

### CREDENTIALS

California General Administrative Credential - Life

California General Secondary Teaching Credential – Life

California General Elementary Teaching Credential – Life

**HONORS AND RECOGNITION**

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- E. Manfred Evans Award, California Council of Adult Education, Outstanding Leadership in Adult Education – 1992
- Los Niños Heroes Award, City Terrace Coordinating Council, Service to the Community – 1993
- California State Adult Education Administrator of the Year Award, Association of California School Administrators – 1993
- Robert Rupert Award, California Council of Adult Education, Exceptional Leadership in Adult Education – 1993
- Human Relations Education Award, City of Los Angeles Human Relations Commission – 1994
- Women Educators of Los Angeles Award, Extraordinary Leadership and Support – 1994
- District Administrator of the Year Award, Association of California School Administrators, Los Angeles Unified School District – 1995
- Distinguished Educators Alumnus of the Year Award, California State University, Los Angeles – 1996

**BOARD AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES**

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- Board of Directors, Industry Education Council of California
- Board of Directors, Workforce LA
- Board of Directors, UNITE-LA Leadership
- Board of Directors, Chinatown Service Center
- Chair, District's Vocational – Technical Education Management Committee
- Chair, The California Credit Union Supervisory Committee
- Member, California's Committee for the Master Plan for Adult Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- Member, California Joint Advisory Panel on Vocational Funding
- Member, Los Angeles Blue Ribbon Job Training Assessment Panel
- Member, California Strategic Plan for Adult Education
- Member, Education and Training Committee, Rebuild LA
- Member, Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now
- Member, Advisory Council, National Certification for Family Literacy

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

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- Associated Administrators of Los Angeles
- Association of California School Administrators
- California Association of Regional Occupational Centers and Programs
- California Council of Adult Education
- Council of Mexican-American Administrators
- Women Educators of Los Angeles