An Evaluation of Historical and Original Ideas in Education with Anne Ruedi

Catherine Gilmore
University of Dallas, cgilmore@udallas.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/oralhistory

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/oralhistory/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at UDigital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral History Interview Projects by an authorized administrator of UDigital Commons. For more information, please contact chohertz@udallas.edu, sgayler@udallas.edu, sthenayan@udallas.edu, emay@udallas.edu, cvandervoort@udallas.edu.
CG: Alright so I'll go ahead and read the first one.

AR: Okay.

CG: Who or what influenced your ideas about education?

AR: Um, the influences, I think, of education have been twofold, one from my own experience in, you know, going to elementary school and I went to a parochial Catholic school. I did that all the way through 8th grade and then after that I went to a private high school, which was Catholic high school so I wasn't exposed as much to the public schools and in those days. Knew a little bit about them, always had this stigma about public school because I went to Catholic and you know it's interesting you start to assess things but you're not really assessing them because I really wasn't in the schools so I just didn’t know how they were teaching. Although I had a very good friend who was educated fully in the public schools and she was very bright and very smart and and I always, you know, felt like you're so much smarter than me and just the way that she would approach her academic her her studying and things like that. I kind of picked a few things up from her. And so I had a good opinion of public schools because I saw my friend being academically challenged and maybe even thought that she was more academically challenged than me. I don't know, I didn't compare but I had a very good impression of how she worked and learned in school and you know I'm just the things she talked about, and the teachers and the way of everything worked. So then in high school I went to an all girls high school so my education was strictly, at that point, really very gender oriented. I think that was okay. It it offered an environment for learning, and without the distractions. Also the type of learning, I think that that offered me the opportunity to really look at different learning styles. and I was just one of these students that, I looked at students who were hard workers and that's what I aspire to be, but I might not have had all the tools or even the full capabilities to be that. So I reached out and
connected with people I thought were, you know, good learners and then I would study with
them. Ask them for some insights on notes and how they did things so I can learn from them and
just build on what I already knew from grammar school.

CG: That’s a good way to go about it.

AR: That’s how I thought. You know, well, I’m not going to do this this on my own so I always
aspired to connect and do better. In high school I really enjoyed my English teacher, think that
was my strongest subject. I love learning and reading books, talking about them, finding newer
meanings inside of every book about the writers, the authors, the illustrators. Just all the way
around- annotating. I just really enjoyed, I couldn't say that was my favorite teacher, but I would
say that was my favorite subject. and that's what I thought, I had some teachers I like better than
others. I think that taught me the most because it was the opportunity to think and I loved that.

Whereas is math was just more concrete. I did take a language in Italian and really she was very
very exciting, fun and she was always the fun person to take classes with so I enjoyed that. I
wasn't very strong in taking second language and that was something that I always wish I was.
Maybe there was a disconnect in my learning ability, but English was definitely more my
subject. I did enjoy science when we were hands-on and things like that. History was kind of
tough, it was more of a dull teaching from what I can remember. It wasn't as exciting, it was
small little room this big and just not a lot of annotation and just excitement. So history, and you
fall in love with education, and I mean, you fall in love with different subjects because you had
good teachers and not such good teachers who brought it alive. loved biology because I loved the
teacher: liked the way she looked, liked the way she smelled, liked the way she brought the class
into the to the level of learning for the day. So those are the things that I can remember that gave
me such….about education. Um 6th grade, specifically, was Sister Barbara. Not that she was my
favorite, she's actually very good, but very good at teaching, stern-looking sometimes, but she
taught me so much about vocabulary. And I learned to love vocabulary from that point. Just the
way we studied it, the way we re….we had words every week and how we went about those and
how we brought those vocabulary alive and broken apart. I learned so much in vocabulary that
but I can remember and so those were...that was was back in sixth grade which led to high school
and so forth, like that. Those are things that I can specifically, that I would would always be
looking for, I mean increasing my vocabulary it made feel confident about what I can read, what
I can down actually phonetically what I can break apart. And I can read a word and phonics, to
me, was an eye-opener. You know?

CG: That’s great.

AR: I didn’t even take Latin or anything, they didn’t require as much in high school for us. Um
that's what I found different but, well we’ll get into that, but I found that was exhilarating for me
to learn and that just set my...I was successful at it. And so my favorite teacher of all time was a
nun. And she has um, she was my 7th grade teacher and then she ultimately became the principal
of the school. She was the kindest, Sister Norma Jean was her name, Sister Norma Jean. And she
was...we really became friends. You know? I was a friend to her and she was such a caring,
nurturing, awesome woman. Not spectacular as a teacher so much, but she's just cared and
therefore she was able to connect with kids. And it was tough, I always felt bad when kids
misbehaved in the class because I knew with it hard it was hard for her, but ultimately it
strengthened her because she became the principal of the school and she knew how to to be a
leader for the kids in the school and she passed away very young so that was a real...she was
really instrumental person in my life seventh grade, when you need somebody.

CG” Yeah, that’s the age you really need someone to support you.
AR: MMhmm. And seventh and eighth because then she became the principal. So I had really
good Middle School, when I was saying sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade, I kind of had
really good base of learning and formation and good people that were working with me, that I
thought were good people and that led me to, you know, the next the next stage.

CG: So this is kind of a broad question, but what is your philosophy of education? What do you
believe about education? What it should be?

AR: I believe that education is an investment; it is a journey and it never really ends, it's just,
Uuhhh it's just different stages, you know. We start as a young baby and we learn to crawl and
learn to walk. I believed that education is the same way. And some people can go faster than
others, and I you know we can read faster - today is kinda about reading quickly and you want
your baby read at two when that’s just, that's just to me nonsense because it's all about the person
maturing. And with maturity becomes the ability to learn. Someone once told me that and it put
my mind at ease, is that a teacher once said, “with maturity comes the ability to learn”. And if
you rush maturity... you can’t rush maturity, right? So maturity is not something we can all rush.

CG: That’s very true.

AR: So how do we rush education? Because the ability to learn has not quite clicked in that area
of learning, subject, or reading, or whatever it is. It can be all the way up through college, so if
you put someone in college and it's too early then they’re not going to be successful

CG: So do you think that’s a problem with our school systems today? Trying to rush learning?

AR: Yes, I do. I think they...the most important years, and what you all doing here, is those
fundamental beginning years. And I'm kindergarten now is first, first is now second, second is
now third. So with maturity comes the ability to learn, if you're not mature enough, there's some
kids that will be, but that's not the majority, what about the average child? The average child
could become an accelerated learner if they’re ummm able to learn at their rate and be able to be educated wholly. And I mean by that is...is the learning of reading, and the math. I mean I'm all the 3 R's you know? It’s just reading, arithmetic, what’s the other one?

CG: writing.

AR: Writing.

CG: Writing, yeah.

AR: So, but I see a lot of steps in education today being skipped. And I saw it with my own children. And I do have regrets... and, and life situations turn you, you know, bring you to certain ways and the world speaks louder. You know? They say no, we want this way and this way. I think that today...so I believe that educating... and I remember specifically learning in first grade and reviewing in second grade, learning in second grade and reviewing in third grade, and the reviews and then and then the learning. Some years were bigger than others: there big bursts, like in fifth grade you learn a lot, in third grade you learn a lot and then seventh grade you learn a lot, eighth grade you review and then high school. So I just see that those were, umm those things can still happen today, okay, but I saw lots of review and repetitiveness and I believe that the way the human brain works is that we need that repetitiveness, to a certain degree, okay?

Because then what kids try to do, and what I see my kids try to do, is they try to memorize. You can't memorize when you get to a certain page, there is too much information. The ability to learn hasn't been developed. It’s only gone so far, it hasn’t been exercised. Sometimes I think they don’t teach them to, to study at a young age.

CG: Or to study correctly?

AR: Because, I find, if you know how to study, that opens up a whole world to you.Right?

CG: Mmhmm.
AR: So today’s schools, I don’t know if you even want to get me started on that but they don’t
teach these kids to learn anymore. They teach them to a test, okay? So there are holes. Lots of holes. My most critical thing is that I think Kindergarten, first, second, third, and fourth and fifth are key learning areas. There just so monumental, foundational years. I mean in order to get you into sixth and be successful, and then you’ve got different foundational times there, but I say that because this is where you can close gaps: they’re learning, their comprehension, they’re understanding how to do that. Those are those important years because I don’t think you think you can make those up again. Because then they go so fast that the kids feel lost and so what they do is they cut corners. And that’s what I think the public schools are doing. Maybe even private, I don’t know. They cut corners.

CG: So what reforms do you think schools could make? Or what could schools do to try to educate children wholly while still trying to educate every child?

AR: Are we talking public?

CG: I mean, any school

AR: I don’t know what private schools do but they probably try to keep up with the public and integrate technology, but that’s another story. Uummmm, What would I do? What would I suggest for reform? Well, somehow we all got educated, okay. I think going back into the basics and making sure that everybody has learned, what are we talking, phonetics? Reading properly, reading for, you know, understanding. Reading for understanding. And learning how to read and summarize and understanding what you read because you’re unlocking keys there that...for the rest of their life because this is like a repetitive thing. It's, it's, it's a skill. I think too that you can use, if you could reform it and use that holistic approach for phonetics and get the memorization and the repetitiveness inside of their brains and then use technology. And this is
where I think technology could be really, really usable, and teaching them to use it properly, is using an iPad or whatever and, you know, a reading game so they can reinforce what they've done with a new visual, with a new way because again you're, you're in printing everything they're running into the brain. I don't know how people see that here, but I think incorporating technology in a limited fashion and then having that as being a special part of the day where they're excited about learning and they get to use the Ipads, or they get to use those. And then you get to make sure they've learned properly. And they’re actually reading an “cat” and “hat”, they're putting the letters in and they can have it you know, like a program, that actually helps to know that they’ve learned it well.

CG: Do you think schools are relying too much on technology to teach the kids at this point?

AR: Yes, you’ve got a hands down yes on that. I see it. I substitute now, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and pretty much every week, and what I'm seeing is that these kids are playing on technology. It's not being used always for the class. There are some assignments yes and that’s what I’m saying, being able to introduce something and teach a child how to use this tool from the beginning, it does not go home with them, it stays in the classroom as a tool, and then they’ve learn to use it properly. They use it too much. Technology is way too much of a cruch and I'll give you examples of AP and pre-AP and all of this right now is happening. In the high school kids that are gifted and that are AP levels are the ones that are being expected to learn on their own. Give you an example; a kid walked away with an AP in physics, he got an A. He got a two on his AP test. It tells you that the rigor is not there. The teacher will pass them because the efforts and all that’s going into it, they’re getting A’s but they’re not teaching the rigor that the national level wants them to teach. So therefore, the whole reason you’re taking that class, to get it passed and college and whatever...but you’re not able to pass that. Where’s the gap? What is
happening here? The teachers aren’t being trained for the rigor, they’re taking the path of least resistance right? Because it's not easy to teach AP but they're getting, they need those APs taught, so they just grabbing the best teacher they can and saying “do the best you can with it”. This is what’s happening.

CG: So do you think the path to college, or college prep, in a way has put too much pressure on kids and the teachers don't know how to teach it so they're trying to learn it themselves?

AR: Yes. Very, very well said, yes. And they're pushing this agenda now for kids to learn on their own. I’m seeing this now. I’m seeing kids being able to sit down on their own and teachers are kinda just staying “here and go do this” and “go find this resource”. They don’t have a textbook anymore. They have to figure out what the teacher’s trying to say: go get the information here and get the information here. So it's really it's almost like self-learning. It's really...it’s just.. I had a chance to teach and just talk about something and I had all the kids and all the technology off and we, we know we're talking about some uuhhh, what was it? Just the other day and there was a lesson. And it was a writing prompt! I said no phones, no anything. I just want a piece of paper and a pen in your hand.

CG: Back to the basics!

AR: And that’s what I got to do. And I got to ask them questions and think about what this prompt meant. And it was fun. I mean I felt like that was an element of teaching.

CG: So we talked a lot about, I guess, some of the reforms or the negative things in the school, but what are some positive things that you see in the public school system?

AR: Okay so what I see in the school systems today is, okay, I see teachers, for the most part are really there and they care about students. And so there’s, as opposed to a private school, there's the positiveness there. They're happy to be there. One of the most impressive things that I've seen
is the principal at this Middle School East, there’s West and there’s North, my son went to West
but I’m in East, she knows every student's name. She greets them, she embraces them when she
needs to, I mean like a high fives and just you know, not being so politically correct, she just
love those students. She cares and she cares as much about her teachers. What do I think that is?
I think that that is total support for who you are, what you're doing, and when a teacher and
students feel supported and loved and cared for they, in turn, give you their best. So it's an
environment of learning, I think education is, I’ve seen that positiveness in the public schools. I
see that they care. Ummm, they will work hard for the average student The average student and
will work hard for the behind student.

Then also sometimes, like I said, bringing about some of the technology has been important. But
if a teacher like yourself for working in a public school you would have the best of both worlds
because you're going to bring the traditional learning to the classroom and I think you can you
can compare it and see when you use traditional methods and how they learn, how they're
listening, it will offer a positive experience for you. Kids are well behaved, to a certain degree, in
a public school. And sometimes private school kids just have a different, maybe they feel more
privileged. Sometimes the ones in the public school don't feel is privileged right? That could be a
positive or negative depending on how you look at it, but I see a lot of teachers engage with kids
and give the child benefit of the doubt. These children come, they might not have a lot in their
homes, they might not have as much in parent involvement, they might have broken homes so
you got that to contend with on that student. So who do you want to be for that student? You
want to be a source of positive in their life and that's what I see in public schools. I see them
really ready to help kids.
CG: That's great! Umm so you’re obviously in the education world but how have you seen schools change from your school days to where schools are today?

AR: Well, first of all, the technology, the testing. The testing, I think, back in the day when we were tested we didn't even know we were going to be tested until the day before. And then they just...no school! We were just happy, we got our pencils. We didn’t even think about it. It’s something different from the regular day and we just did our little circles and we never thought.

CG: It’s hard to imagine.

AR: Huh?

CG: It’s hard to imagine.

AR: It’s hard to imagine. I didn’t go crazy thinking about the ACT and the SAT. I mean, it was a test I had to take at the end of my learning. But why was it different back then? Because we were being taught. They didn't doubt that we didn’t know it,. I knew we were taught it based on the repetition and the, methods of teaching. We learned, right? That, that's what I think. But today it's so competitive I think of that's another thing today in education and I see you so much more competitive. I think they're pushing people to higher levels. Some people can do it and the ones that can't they feel dumb. I’ll give you an example, my son Harry. He is a teacher now at North Hills, he said when he went to Benedictine College, he took all AP classes in his high school because that’s all they wanted him to take or the IB but he didn’t do the IB program, he went to college thinking he was stupid. So let’s look at that: Public Charter School, all AP, all IB. So the competition to be the best but yet you didn't even allow your AP Student to recognize their success and then where they were going. So there was a break down there, the breakdown of positiveness and positive reinforcement in the teachers. And that's my, and well that, that was what the school was like. Today is much different in Harry's view and the teachers have changed
things have changed. And people didn’t seem happy, maybe because the competition was so
tough for these teachers, too much pressure is put on them in order to advance them. I see a lot of
that today: I think that that's why you're having these teachers, you know maybe give them some
resources, and not teaching as hard and rigor because it's, it's, it's maybe more than the teachers
can do.
CG: That’s true.
AR: You know?
CG: Do you remember when you were first tested? Or what age you started testing when you
were in school?
AR: Third grade. I don’t think I even got a test until I was in third grade, third or fourth grade.
Third grade was maybe like the, whatever-they-are, SAR test and then those and then, then we
had at the end of the year. I remember always liking April. We always had end of the year tests.
Only once a year! Not two, not three, not four times. And I see panic in a lot of these teachers.
I’ll tell you another thing I see a lot of, I see, in the public schools-it’s so funny you’re asking me
this because they’re constantly doing this “i-station” and these kids get on in and they’re like “we
got to do i-station, we got to do i-station” And the teachers get into a panic because they must
have seen a grade or something or seen that they’re not doing really well so all the sudden they
panic and want them to do i-station.
CG: What is I-station?
AR: i-station is an iPad, technology, you get on there and you have to listen to it and you have to
follow it through to complete it, read. And it’s reading for understanding so it’s, s it's not reading
a book and being tested on it. It’s “we need to hurry and get this done”, like there is a sense of
urgency all the time.
I’m sure the students sense that.

And if it's not, they don’t care.

Yeah, I hear that a lot in my practicum, a kid will raise their hand, “Are we getting grade for this?”

Right. If they’re not getting graded, they don’t care. Another thing- when I was giving the test, I had the opportunity to give a test to these kids and, it was a quiz, so not a test, and umm they panicked. They, okay so the amount of looking at things. And you can tell who really just got down to business and doing the work and kids who “oh I need a Kleenex” and I mean, like they all the sudden you know, I put the Kleenex there and I said, “don’t worry, I’ll bring the Kleenex to you” and they would just get up because they're just so competitive and insecure and, you know, just those test-taking, those test-taking ability and just ability, and then and then the level of, I would say cheating, or what was the teacher stating? What is she saying? This is your work and I said to the kids “you know this is your work? If you cheat, you’re cheating yourself because you’re not going to know the information when you need it”. So I'm not sure that they're taught, because they’re so competitive, I’m not sure; they just want to get it done and they want to get it right and technology sometimes doesn't allow them to not get it right. I mean, they can change things and, you know, I am just kind of executing but I don't feel like “wow” and this is, I don't see them reading. Well sometimes I see them reading books. You can tell the learners, the kids that may be enforced at home. I think that this learning also takes place at home too.

Families expect reading, brought you up reading to them. That’s another philosophy of education if you want to write that is that reading, reading, reading, reading to your children. I couldn’t tell you how many times I went to the library, that’s why I’m looking around thinking “oh my gosh!
These are where all the books are!” We would get millions of books and just read, read, read, and read every night. And I have to be honest, some of my regrets are is that I, you know, I took the path of least resistance when they didn't want to read. And maybe there was something wrong, maybe we didn't want to, you know, there was other activity in the family or whatever and then I see Danny, my oldest, and he was such a great reader, read books all time. High school messed him up, you don't have to read, you've got technology. So I think technology has hurt boys especially because they’re single tracked-mind things. Very difficult, very very difficult.

CG: So what are some ways you think you could encourage reading through high school?

Reading for pleasure or not…

AR: Well, North Hills doesn’t have any technology, they don't even let you bring a cell phone in the classroom. So here I’m saying it, do I think that the technology is, is good? I don't think it's all bad but I think used and controlled and taught. Okay you teach them how to read, you teach them how to annotate, you teach them how to, you know, do algebra, and do formulas. Well why can’t we teach them how to use technology? And how it’s used so they feel confident when they go use it for finding something in algebra, or finding something in reading or whatever. But I think that’s where the breakdown is.

CG: Do you think that technology has developed so quickly that teachers don’t know how to teach?

AR: Yes I believe, well, that they’ve been told that they have to rely on technology. And then I think that they have a learning curve themselves. I would have a learning curve on how to make sure that all my students were understanding how to use the technology to learn but yes, I do I
think that there's a lot of things that have been, you know, incorporated there. I think the teachers
are mandated on how they’re supposed to do things they want a job.

CG: That’s true. So do you have any advice for future teachers? What would be some advice you
would tell them?

Pause

AR: Well, I definitely would...when you, when you're looking to become a teacher, you know,
we don't want to walk away from what the world is otherwise I'll be too out there, you will be too
alone. I think that studying all the methods that they have, and how they want to use technology,
first of all, and how you can incorporate technology. And I have seen some teachers incorporated
it and not rely on it. There’s a difference between relying on technology and using it like a
babysitter- it’s not different from a mother putting kids in front of a television and letting the
television babysit the kids. And then what happens you're not, you're not working with the
development of their brains and not working with the development of their personalities and their
development of everything.

CG: Alright. Let’s see, so what is your best school memory? I know you talked a lot about your
favorite teacher…

AR: My best school memory, ummm, well maybe grammar school and high school, maybe
college- I had some in college too. Ummmmm…

CG: What state did you go to school in?

AR: I went to school in Illinois, so I went to Eastern Illinois University. Umm, some of my best
school memories... you know, I think when I got to, I mean elementary with you know like I
really love the 6th 7th and 8th grade. I felt like a real strong, I was beginning to be stronger
learner. I had good teachers, loved that time of my life. I felt, it was a really good school I went
to… just an environment I was in. I still felt safe, you know, safe as a learner. High school, I can remember specifically freshman, sophomore year, big years of learning, big years of getting to know friends. And I felt like I really and really had a really good experience with building friendships with all of these umm girls and just my sisters and my family, all of..so that was positive to me. Those were positive times. College was fun, I mean, really liked college. I enjoyed going off to… I went to Community College to take some of the harder courses because that’s something that I, I recognize some of my areas that I wasn't strong in, right. Like accounting. It just wasn't something I could do well, but some of my best experiences was umm being at being involved in my in college, my campus things and activities, being part of, selecting my Major. One of my favorite classes in college with business law, an excellent teacher just dynamic and I always, you know, learn better under conditions of uhhh, one of my major things is that I recognize when somebody is like passionate about what they love, they just do so much much better at teaching. So I mean those are just some my best memories because I've got, you know, a store of memories of teachers that had such passion and when I had children, and homeschooling came about and I just started doing what Clare did, you know that’s where she got it.. I mean, I just started loving books and bringing books and the home and watching children learn live in the home and and educate them and, how to cook, clean, be part of a family and all that. So It totally have a very strong appreciation for homeschooling families done well. I think that it has a good positive exposure into our society. I think it helps a lot. I don’t know if that answers your questions. But my memories are, you know, they’re vast. I think I have a different memory at each level of my education.

CG: Alright, awesome. Well thank you so much Mrs. Ruedi!

AR: I hope I helped.
CG: You did! It was wonderful. Thank you!

AR: So do you think you want to work in a public school?

CG: Ummm..

AR: Certain public schools to, like I think South Lake, I heard does everything traditional. A best friend of mine says they have the technology but limited and do more traditional teaching.

CG: I think it depends, I mean, the district and where I end up in life but I could see myself teaching at a public school. I know they need a lot of good teachers now.

AR: You know, they do! And they need them and they're going to be...I think that, that the pendulums going to swing. I think they're going to find success you know if they're going to find that they need more of traditional teachings alongside with some of the new things that they can offer them.

CG: Someone who can incorporate both of them, yes.

AR: Yeah.