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# Educational Experiences of a Psychology Professor: Dr. Robert Kugelman

Laura DiIulio

*University of Dallas*, [ldiulio@udallas.edu](mailto:ldiulio@udallas.edu)

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Laura DiIulio  
Interview Transcript  
Dr. Newstreet  
November 9, 2017

1 Laura: Ok, so for the first question, what schools did you attend in your childhood? What were  
2 they like?

3 Kugelmann: My first school was Holy Family School in Weehawken New Jersey, I went  
4 kindergarten and first grade there, and that's where I had my first friend, that we used to  
5 together in the yard next to his house and I remember I was madly in love with Mrs. Johnson  
6 my kindergarten teacher, she had red hair. I used to walk to school I was able I was five years  
7 old but I was able to walk to school by myself, I wasn't supposed to but I did

8 L: Yeah

9 K: And I'd even walk home by myself it was, you know I had to walk I don't know how many  
10 blocks but past a business district, the downtown area, but it was no problem.

11 L: It was a bit of a different world probably back then that sounds so nice

12 K: It was it was kind of a city you know it was a city setting

13 L: Yeah,

14 K: Then we moved and from second grade to eighth grade I went to St. Mary's School in  
15 Middletown New Jersey

16 L: So catholic school K-8

17 K: Catholic school, yes, all the way through. And that was fine we had huge classes there  
18 were 60 kids in a class, one teacher all day

19 L: Wow

20 K: Yeah, I don't know how they, and it was mainly nuns, I don't know how they did it,  
would've drove me nuts

21 L: And just to, moving on to

22 K: High school?

23 L: Oh the, well the next question is, which this can incorporate high school as well I guess

24 K: Ok

25 L: Who was a favorite teacher that you had

26 K: In grade school?

27 L: Or at any time, I know you mentioned the kindergarten teacher with the red hair

28 K: Yeah, I wouldn't call her my favorite teacher, I don't remember what she taught, I guess  
29 how to write, things like that

30 L: Yeah, yeah

31 K: But I don't remember that specifically. My favorite teacher was in college and it was a  
32 man named Patrick Mullahy, M-U-L-L-A-H-Y, and he taught, I had him for three psychology  
33 classes, and I really liked him. He was, he had a reputation of being gruff and mean, but he  
34 was a delight, and I learned an awful lot from him and it affected, he was the only person I  
35 kept in contact, you know, the only faculty member I kept in contact with after I graduated.

36 L: Really

37 K: I went over and had dinner with him once years later I corresponded with him, and  
38 fortunately I, he died around 1980 but I did have some, you know, contact with him. There  
39 were a lot, years later I realized there were a lot of questions I might have asked him that I  
40 never thought to ask him at the time

41 L: Yeah

42 K: But, that's the way it goes

43 L: And what, what university was this?

44 K: Manhattan College

45 L: Manhattan College, ok I remember you said in class

46 K: Yeah, in the Bronx

47 L: Nice, what was something memorable that he installed in you, I guess psychology maybe?

48 K: Yeah, he taught, he had been, I don't know what exactly his relationship was with Harry

49 Stack Sullivan the great American psychiatrist, but he introduced me to Sullivan's work, and

50 he wrote on it extensively. Sullivan developed what he called an interpersonal theory of

51 psychiatry, and when I learned about phenomenology I went oh, Sullivan was on the same

52 track. So, Sullivan, or what I learned from Sullivan's approach and that stuck with me ever

since

53 L: Yeah, whoa. What hobbies or extracurricular activities were you involved in?

54 K: When in college?

55 L: Growing up, it could be college, high school, elementary

56 K: Ohh, we, the kids, I had a lot of kids in my neighborhood so we did baseball in the

57 summer, and football in the fall and winter, and then basketball later on. I was terrible at them,

58 but I liked that. Bicycling, a friend of mine and I, we bicycled when we lived in New Jersey to

59 Valley Forge, it was 100 miles, when I was 16

60 L: Is that in New York?

61 K: That's in Pennsylvania

62 L: Oh Pennsylvania ok wow

63 K: Overnight we made it all day we stayed at a motel and the next day we rode our bikes out

64 to Valley Forge where we spent the day and the next day we rode home again. So I liked

65 biking, if my high school had a bicycle team or club I would have joined but they didn't and

66 you know, it never even occurred to me that that was even possible, but I liked, I went all over

67 the county down to the beach and the hills and everything. So that was a hobby.

68 L: Awesome, well when did you become interested in psychology and in the human sciences?

69 K: My junior year in college

70 L: Junior year

71 K: I was a math major, and I had taken a semester off and I was doing my quote on quote

72 Rome semester, I was travelling around Europe on my own

73 L: Oh, ok

74 K: And it dawned on me at that point, I don't wanna do math, what am I gonna do with math?

75 So I was kind of thinking about that and I went into a bookstore in Thessalonica Greece and

76 just happened to be there, and I found a book called *Understanding Media* by Marshall

77 McLuhan, and I read it and I thought that's what I wanna do. And it was a book about the way

78 consciousness is affected by technology, you know first the alphabet and then printing press

79 and then things like the typewriter, the television, it was a really interesting study by this guy

80 who's a, by training has a literary critic. But he was interested in this, well you could call it

81 history of consciousness

82 L: Ok

83 K: And that really grabbed me so I said how do I do that so I took classes in psychology,

84 anthropology and sociology but psychology seemed to me the closest to it.

85 L: Did you return to Manhattan College?

86 K: I did return to Manhattan College after taking the semester off and I finished my major in math

87 L: Oh, ok

88 K: Because if I had changed majors I would have had to stay an extra year

89 L: Yeah

90 K: And I would have lost my draft deferral, because you only got a draft deferral for four

91 years and I didn't wanna lost, I didn't wanna risk not graduating

92 L: Yeah, yeah

93 K: So I decided, I figured out a way to take the minimum amount of courses I needed in math to graduate

94 L: I can understand that!

95 K: And took all my classes in whatever I felt was you know, so I took two philosophy classes

96 I took four psychology classes, I took the equivalent of lit trad I and II

97 L: Ok

98 K: But they didn't call it that but it was essentially that

99 L: Like an English class

100 K: Oh it was great, it was great

101 L: Let me see what do we have next. So what would you recall as some political or world

102 event that impacted your education as a student?

103 K: The Vietnam war

104 L: Yeah

105 K: I started college as a very conservative student, I had campaigned in my county for Barry

106 Goldwater in 1964, and I was a right-winger anti-communist because that's what I grew up with

107 L: Yeah!

108 K: You know it was like, as someone said the American religion in the 1950's was anti-

109 communism, so it was certainly part of my family, my community, my parish, and I

110 remember going down I was doing some volunteering down in Harlem tutoring kids on

111 Saturday morning with a friend of mine who was, whose parents had met working for the

112 Catholic Workers, so he was as leftist as I was a rightist, and I remember walking back from

113 our tutoring walking along the streets of Harlem at like 10 o'clock in the morning arguing

114 over the Vietnam war. That first summer in between freshman and sophomore year I got a

115 job with this, through this program with the archdiocese of New York called Summer in the

116 City, so this would have been summer 1967, so it was a pivotal year in history, as well as for

117 me personally. And I was living and working in the lower east side of Manhattan and I saw

118 for the first time poverty, I saw for the first time people who were subjected to systematic

119 oppression, it was a mainly Puerto Rican neighborhood but not exclusively, and it turned me

120 around. So by the end of that summer I was ready to join Fidel

121 L: Oh gosh

122 K: So I was, I was in ROTC, I got out of ROTC on conscientious objector grounds so really

123 it was that experience in the lower east side that really opened, as I saw it, opened my eyes to

124 you know the hypocrisy that underlied a lot of American society. Because I had only seen

125 things as a middle class white guy, and now I saw, you know a little bit because I was living

126 with you know, had friends down there, working with kids and so on, and it just was a real

transformative moment

127 L: When you realized how privileged that you had been?

128 K: I was privileged and I was also blind to how other people were living and that affected my life, still does.

129 L: It's almost as if once you see that, you can't, there's no going back

130 K: No going back

131 L: You can't, you know you can't ignore that

132 K: No. So it did you know it changed my, you know like, I remember when I resigned, when  
133 I got out of ROTC I wrote a letter to my parents, my father was really disappointed, but he  
134 also he accepted you know he didn't reject me or anything but he was disappointed because  
135 who's gonna fight the communists? That was the way it was phrased, and you know he  
136 meant it sincerely you know and I remember writing this long thoughtful letter to him about  
where I was.

137 L: So what about as a teacher, going back to the same question, what were some political or  
138 world events that impacted your career as a teacher or how you look at things as a teacher  
and an educator?

139 K: I guess the biggest thing that's affected me in terms of being a teacher has little to do with  
140 psychology, and it's the environmental crisis, the way we're, we I mean not just the United  
141 States, but industrial society while it has given us a lot of goods it's also depleting and  
142 destroying the environment and that's my major concern politically and you know I don't  
143 have a chance to teach climate change or anything like that but that's you know that kind of  
144 ecological perspective is really important to me

145 L: Yeah

146 K: And you know I think there's, I'm not pessimistic, but it's a source of real concern that we  
147 may not do enough to prevent serious consequences from climate change.

148 L: No yeah absolutely that was something I noticed actually, moving from New Hampshire  
149 where, you know the northeast is very, well not very, but I mean more eco-friendly I would  
150 say, and moving here you know, where's the recycling, where are the recycling bins? It threw  
me off

151 K: Yeah, yeah but you know even where I came from, lived in, I grew up in Middletown  
152 New Jersey which is a very conservative republican area

153 L: Yeah

154 K: Climate change and environmental things are not a political topic, everybody's on board

155 L: Yeah

156 K: So like New Jersey is really strong like in solar panels, solar energy, and so on

157 L: Yes, yes

158 K: But not so much in Texas, although in some respects Texas is doing alright, with solar and  
159 wind, despite the idiocy of our politicians, and I won't redact that

160 L: No. Ok, let me see, so for our next question, how long have you been teaching?

161 K: 39 years

162 L: 39 years, ok

163 K: 35 of them here

164 L: Wow I didn't realize you'd been here that long

165 K: Yeah since 1982

166 L: So you've really seen, you know, the school, how its changed

167 K: Oh yeah, yeah

168 L: Wow that's crazy

169 K: It's crazy, the new buildings, you know I walk, I can walk across campus like the

170 beginning of the semester I was walking across campus from here to the SB Hall for class  
171 and I just started remembering all the faculty members that I've known that have died, I think  
172 it's a long list now. But a lot of good people that have been here

173 L: Yeah I mean if you're there that long you know, I'm sure that you knew a lot of people

174 K: Yeah

175 L: Wow, so I guess the next question was how long have you been teaching at university  
level but

176 K: Yeah 39 years and I taught at Seattle University for 4 years

177 L: Ok, ok

178 K: And then I came back here in '82 and I've been here ever since

179 L: Ok. What stands out to you as the most formative experience that you've had as a teacher?

180 Is there anything, anyone in particular?

181 K: The most formative experience I've had as a teacher, hmm, I guess there's not one thing  
182 that stands out but it's getting to know some of the students you know on a more personal  
183 level over the years you know once in a while there's a student I mean you know I try to be, I  
184 don't play favorites or anything like that

185 L: Yeah

186 K: But every once in a while there's a student that really has a gift and that you know I feel a  
187 strong obligation to try to cultivate that student's talents and sometimes that does happen,  
188 you know you see a student that's, boy I wish I were that bright, or talented, so that's really  
189 enlightening for me. The other thing that, one of the things that drew me back to UD was the  
190 fact that you know you do have these common educational experiences that students here,  
191 you know I don't think that students here are that much different than students elsewhere in  
192 terms of raw ability, but the expectation here is that you take learning seriously for its own  
193 sake, and that's a gift and that's why I returned and why I have stayed.

194 L: So I guess kind of piggy backing on that, what are some differences that you have seen in  
195 respect to students from when you started teaching to now to 2017?

196 K: You know sometimes it's said oh students are not as good as they used to be, I don't think  
197 that's true I think that's nonsense. My relationships with students have changed as I've gotten  
198 older and they've stayed the same age, I remember when I first walked in to a classroom like  
199 up at Seattle University, I wasn't that much older than the upper division class of the upper  
division students

200 L: Oh wow that must be so weird!

201 K: It was really weird, I wanted to sit in the back and wait for the teacher to show up. You  
202 know and its different being someone who is like 30 teaching 22 year olds and someone  
203 who's over 60. So my relationship with students has changed partly as a function that you  
204 know that as I've aged and you know I'm dealing with people of the same age in the 18-22  
205 year age range, that relationship has changed because now I can say well you guys are  
206 younger than my youngest kid, you know in your class right now. And that's, that's weird.  
207 Not weird, its, I've also met students who tell me that "oh you taught my mother" you know  
208 so that's, so my relationship has changed as I see students more now as the way I view my  
209 own children than I used to. I don't mean that in a patronizing kind of way like I think of  
210 them as kids but I think of them you know when I see the classes and the students I think of  
211 my own children, and I couldn't do that years ago. So the students are different but it's not  
212 because they've gotten better or worse I mean there are different issues, you know you have  
213 the internet and cell phones and all that stuff, but I haven't, to me that hasn't been that

214 significant a change, its opened up new possibilities and created some difficulty but its, I  
215 think students are equally talented, equally serious, equally able to write as they were 30  
216 years ago, you won't hear everybody say that I don't think

217 L: That's a positive, I like that, you know we get a lot of flak as millennials that we're certain  
things, we're that, you know

218 K: You know part of that is "you kids" "kids these days", but old people always say that, it's  
219 part of the you might say archetype of being older, you see the younger generation as  
220 defective, where you didn't see yourself defective when you were young

221 L: No, hindsight is 20/20 I guess

222 K: Yeah or sometimes its misty

223 L: So going back to, kind of University of Dallas and your other experience in Seattle, is  
224 there anything or what have you noticed at UD as opposed to where you taught in Seattle  
225 about like it could be like the students, the environment, is there anything that kind of struck  
you as different?

226 K: Yeah the students up there they were, they could have fit onto UD's campus there's no  
227 problem with that in terms of like their abilities or what they look like, so on so forth like  
228 that. They did tend to be, tended to be more practically oriented and they didn't have the  
229 advantage of a common curriculum so it was hard to make connections with psychology and  
230 other stuff, like I couldn't just say you know Achilles you know and because they wouldn't  
231 have, maybe some of them would have read *The Iliad* but the rest of them wouldn't have

232 L: Yeah that's very true I wouldn't have thought of that

233 K: Yeah or I can say you know, well Aristotle's 4 causes, now I know most of the students in  
234 the class haven't had like that but they know they're gonna get it and they expect to get it. So  
235 I think it's the common curriculum the core curriculum that really does make a difference  
236 outside of the core and it does shape students in a way that's distinctive.

237 L: Ok, and so just for the final question, is there anything else you would like to add about  
238 anything we talked about, anything education or your experiences as a student or as a  
teacher?

239 K: I guess I would add this because it's not something you asked about that I've, even though  
240 you know this is a teaching university I've had enormous freedom to do research and to write  
241 on any topic that I want. I haven't been in a situation where I have to do some kind of  
242 statistical analysis, I know people that have, you know if you're not doing "real science"  
243 you're not doing anything, but we don't have that kind of pressure, and so I've had  
244 opportunities to be creative, to try to be creative at any rate, in ways that I might not have had  
elsewhere.

245 L: Kind of greater independence in what you wanna pursue?

246 K: Greater independence yeah and I feel that you know Dr. Donald Cowan when he was  
247 president talked about UD as a community of learners. So I see myself more as a learner than  
248 as a teacher, that's why I said in that class you know "I don't know what this mind means!"

249 L: Yeah

250 K: I mean you know that's true though it's an exploration for me it's not something that I'm  
251 just you know jot out the old notes every semester, try to think things through, and that's  
252 really what makes teaching a delight

253 L: Yeah I'm sure that you learn a lot too by teaching

254 K: I do, I do

255 L: So that is all the questions that I had if you had do you have anything else or anything that you can think

256 K: No that's all for now, that's a wrap

257 L: Alright

Acquired permission before the interview but did not remember to record it, so I went back and obtained it again from Dr. Kugelmann and captured it on tape

L: So I just have to tell you that I have your permission to write down everything that you said and to store the interview in the oral history archives

K: You have my permission to do that

L: And to interview you?

K: And to interview me, signed, Robert Kugelmann

L: Thank you so much