Principal Montgomery: Secondary Education in 2017

Mackenzie Tano

University of Dallas, mtano@udallas.edu

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

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/oralhistory/33

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.
Mackenzie: So can you tell me a little bit about like your upbringing and education, like when you went to school, where, and any activities you might have participated in?

Virdie: Sure I grew up in Graham Texas and I went through all kindergarten through twelfth grade there. Graduated in Graham high school 1972, and went to play basketball at Hardin Simmons for a couple of years in Abilene. Found the love of my life and uh she was graduating and I still needed some, so she got a job teaching in Brownfield Texas out by Lubbock. And uh it was so I went ahead and transferred to Texas Tech cause its right there, and I finished my degree at Texas Tech and got to teach and coach in uh in Brownfield for fifteen years where I was a did everything the first two years and I became a head tennis coach there and we had a lot of success there doing that, and decided I wanted to be a principal and came to uh went and got my masters in Sul Ross State University and got my first principals job at a place called Claude Texas up by Amarillo, class A school. And I spent two years there with the Levelland Middle School for seven years, Levelland high school for five and then came here for two years as assistant principal, went to Commerce for four years, and I’ve been back here ever since. So that’s my education. I have a master degree and superintendent certification, and all of that, and uh played college basketball for two seasons and uh fell in love with tennis though and I coached tennis for fifteen years.

Mackenzie: So what are some similarities and differences you’ve seen from when you went to school to like school now?

Virdie: Its night and day. Uh when I went to school and if we’re talking about high schools, we had to have 18 credits graduate. Classes were an hour long. Okay and uh today we have to have 26 credits, classes are about 50 minutes long, and we are asking more out of kids today than we ever have in the history of time. Uh, you know my first two years in school in high school I spent a lot of time typing. I took four years of typing, and today ya’ll come into high school already knowing how to do it. You know, but I spent four years learning how, now I got good at it. I was typing 125-130 words a minute with no mistake by senior year, but uh and I will say if I had to pick a skill that I learned in school during my time that I still use today, it’s typing. Cause I type a lot, I write a lot, and uh I have people that do it that don’t use whole keys and stuff like that.
But that’s what I remember, that’s the big change. You know the technology was so much different. I typed on a manual type writer which nobody’s even seen in probably two decades, and uh whenever they came out with that IBM with the little head on it and it moved around that was the most awesome thing. I finally got to use that type writer I thought I had died and gone to heaven. So just the uh whole dynamic of schools changed. The only thing that hasn’t changed is we still put kids in rows and teach standing up in front of kids, everything else has just changed totally.

Mackenzie: Do you think it’s a good thing that we’re asking more out of kids now?

Virdie: I wish we’d go back a little bit. I think uh if I had, if I could put together the perfect school I think we should specialize sooner. I think we’re uh (stammering) especially with colleges I see no reason for a kid to go to college and take all the stuff they’re having you take that you’re never ever gonna use, and you’re paying for it. You could cut college expenses in half, I know I’m gonna lose a lot of professors, because I don’t think I think a lot of what the professors are teaching, and their subject matter is just fun for them to do because I don’t think it’s any value to yourself or the people that aren’t interested in that area. I don’t think every kid should have to do that. It’s expensive, (stammering) cause when I was going to college they said we want you to have a well-rounded education, but I was taking courses that I was uninterested in and has not had anything to do with anything I’m doing in life. Why couldn’t I just go and straight into what I’m doing. I think high schools should be the same way. We’re teaching, we’re making kids take subjects that they’re never gonna use, and uh (stammering) whenever I’m saying this out loud and putting it on tape everybody’s gonna think that I’m just as crazy as a loon, but that’s I’ve been in it 41 years and that’s what I see. I use a kid I had up in Commerce for an example. This kid I knew he (stammering) when I met him he was a freshmen and I knew what he was gonna be doing whenever he walked across the stage if I could just get him across the stage. He was gonna work for his dad, and he was gonna work out at the out on the ranch. That’s all the kid ever wanted to do, and I’m sitting there trying to make him take physics his senior year. And he did not want to do physics, but he had to have it to graduate (stammering) the kid was bringing his animals to school in uh in trailers every day and going out during passing period and he was taking care of them. That’s that’s who he was. So why am I taking
and making this kid take algebra II and physics (stammering) and that’s been six seven years ago, and you know what he’s doing today? He’s working out with his dad on the field and he’s doing okay. But but we harassed the dog out of that kid for four years trying to get him to do stuff he didn’t need to do, and we’re doing that. I mean kids once they figure out what they wanna do that’s what we oughta do is get them there as quick as we can.

**Mackenzie:** So why did you decide to go into the profession as a whole?

**Virdie:** I could tell and this is one of my strengths and one of my weaknesses. When I was nine years old I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach and I wanted to coach, and all I ever thought about doing was when I was growing up. I knew, so I make that my weakness because when I see kids at high school age and they don’t know what they want to do I don’t relate to that. My own children when I asked them their senior year “what do you wanna do” they had no idea. I don’t get that cause I’ve always known, so I don’t understand how people don’t already know what they wanna do. Doctor lawyer whatever it is I just don’t get why they don’t know cause I knew and I’ve always known, so that’s a weakness but it’s also a strength in that I do see the value in knowing what you need for a student or a person to know what they wanna do cause once you know what you wanna do there’s hoops you jump through to get there. I’m the only person in my family whoever even went to college much less graduated, but in order for me to do what I wanted to do I saw the path and I knew I had to have a college degree. They weren’t gonna let me teach and coach if I didn’t have a college degree, so that kept me on the path. But I knew what I wanted to do, so when people don’t know what they want to do I don’t care if they’re sixteen, seventeen, nineteen, thirty “what’s the path” “where am I going”. There’s no place to see that, so I see that as a strength as well because I do see that value in knowing what you want to do it’s kinda called goals in some people’s lives. That’s why it’s important to me.

**Mackenzie:** So you’ve held jobs as just teaching, but why did you decide to become like a principal?

**Virdie:** For me personally I had been teaching for, when I hit ten years it got to be and if you know me well enough you know I get bored easily and I like to have things I like change I like
things to be doing, but I married somebody who doesn’t like change oaky she was just as happy being doing what we were doing and the whole bit, but I wanted more. So after about ten years I got I started getting antsy about doing something else. I even looked at getting out of education, but once you’ve got ten years in as an educator you’re not making a lot of money but you’re making more than a say startup jobs gonna do in a profession. So I started looking at other professions and I would’ve had to take a cut in pay to go be an entry level at some other job so I looked at it and said so “what’s the next level”, “what do you do”, “what’s the promotion”, if I’d of had my choice I would’ve wanted to be an athletic director but who hires a tennis coach as an athletic director. It just doesn’t happen, you hire your football coaches to have the athletic director’s job, so I didn’t see any other position in the education field other than principal, I did not want to be a principal, every principal I’d ever known was somebody I didn’t want to be like that, they were mean and they were opinionated and things like that. I may be all of those things, but I didn’t see myself as that why so it didn’t attract me, but then (stammering) after fifteen years I gotta do something else and that was just the natural progression, so I started my masters to work on being a principal and then I fell in love with it. And I thought I don’t have to be like those other people that I’ve seen, we all look at somebody who’s in the profession to kinda take our personality and put it with that. There was nobody like that for me everybody I’d seen do it I didn’t want to do what they did. Once I figured out I could go and still be me and still have my personality and still be around the kids, cause the kids is what drove me there. That was one reason I didn’t want to be a principal cause ever principal I’d ever seen I mean the kids didn’t even know who the guy was and I didn’t want to be that person. You know but once I got into it I fell in love with it and I’m gonna do it the way I wanna do it and finally found somebody who would let me do it.

Mackenzie: What do you think is the overall purpose of school or obtaining an education?

Virdie: See I’m gonna be different there too because when I first started you know people would say we’re trying to get you college ready I never saw it as that. Basically what I saw was even as a teacher I’m gonna teach the curriculum, this is what they want me to teach. I’m gonna teach the curriculum to you if you get it you get it if you don’t you don’t. You’re gonna use it for whatever it is. I think that’s the way to do it. See I’m against grades, I don’t even think we oughta have
grades. I think at your, I taught world history and if you’re gonna come in my world history class I’m gonna make it as inviting as it can be and I want you to want to be in there to learn. Then you’re gonna get out of it what you put into it cause I’ve learned if somebody likes something they’ll get good at it, and I use athletics as an example all the time because I watched kids especially seventh and eighth grade everybody tries out for everything they all wanna do it they all think, but who’s there when they’re seniors and you’re a great example whenever you were a freshman there were lots of freshman. You had a whole team of freshman. How many seniors graduated when you graduated?

Mackenzie: Five

Virdie: Five, so five is all that was left. So, kids go where they’re good and the kids that like it stay there. In Levelland I was a principal, Levelland we’d have seventy something kids come out for seventh grade girls’ basketball because Levelland was a big deal. They have seven state championships there. They averaged about three seniors graduating, so what happened to those seventy kids from seventh grade to those seniors. Kids go where they’re successful, so that’s why I think kids oughta go in there with the reason to learn. Another example I have, I just used this the other day with my staff. I hate grades, because the first part of the year everything is so cool and kids come into your class and they’re excited to be in there every day until you give the first test. Once you give the first test there’s a grade now there’s a pecking order. The smart kids over here and the kids over here. Now they don’t care anymore, they don’t like what you’re teaching. Even the smart kids now that you’ve given a test they’re just looking for what you’re gonna give to them on the test. They’re not really there to learn. They’re in there to what does he want me to know, and give it back to me on a test, so I can get the grade. But if I didn’t have grades then you would come in there every day thinking what is he gonna teach me today and I think you would learn more. I’d like to see a plan like that someday. So I’m different in the respect and I think the job of the teacher is to get you life experience to lead you where you want to go and for you to learn whatever the subject matter is.
Mackenzie: So I would say and I brag about it at UD all the time that Wylie High is a very successful high school, as a principal what do you think is like what sets us apart. What’s the key factor for making a school so efficient.

Virdie: Well you’ve been here and you’ve been here the whole time I was here. If I had to say one thing it would be the relationships. I think the kids wanna come here, come to school for the most part. They know something weird might happen. It’s fun to come to. It’s not such a drudgery to come to, and I think they feel liked. You know? They feel supported. I just believe they time is the most valuable gift you can give anybody, so that’s why I go to stuff. I think if I’m there then the kids know that I value them, okay. I tell parents that the most valuable gift you can give to your kids is to be where your kid is doing stuff, and you know what’s so funny about it is I go around and sometimes I’m there more often than some kid’s parents are. And you know it always pulls me away, I’m going “How is that happening” you know I just feel like every time I go someplace here oughta be you know for the most part (stammering) someone representative of the family should be there, because the kid then looks. That’s where they look, they look up in the stands to see who’s there you know they look for support. Even the coldest callous kids got his eye turned to somebody to see where that person is. I want them to know, **I want a kid to feel like they’re loved, they’re cared for, and that what they are doing matters.** I think if you can make that happen in a culture I think it benefits them.

Mackenzie: Side note I know that was something we always talked about how involved you were and it was something we really appreciated as athletes. Um so I guess more in my age technology has become important in classrooms, do you think this is a good and bad thing or just one or the other?

Virdie: I think it’s a little bit of both. It just depends on what it is you’re going into. I think technology, we’ve become reliant upon it and I can’ stand not to be. Just like right now I felt it buzz, I’ve got an email I don’t know who it’s from and it’s driving me nuts not being able to look at it. And that gets me in trouble driving down the road cause I’m the same way, but I like to be in touch and I think technology keeps you in touch. It is a mechanism to get to kids, that’s
what they do. So and I tell teachers if you’re boring you better be using technology because kids wanna be entertained today.

Mackenzie: Um do you think you’ve noticed a change in the priorities schools hold for academic performances or standards?

Virdie: I think that everything’s gone up. The expectations are high. The expectations are off the charts again like I said a while ago, we’re asking more out of kids today than we’ve ever asked them to do. I mean we’re putting you into situations where you have to know more, you have to do more. Your world is more competitive than it was for me. The downside to what we’re doing today is that in my day there was a place for kids to go who weren’t academic today there’s not many places to go for kids who aren’t academic. You know there’s nobody pumping gas, there’s nobody and that’s all self-serve now and that kid that’s really more of a hands on kids who’s a mechanic. He’s gotta be smart today to even get a mechanics job you didn’t use to have to be that way, so the technology is what drives it and uh I think we’re missing the boat if we don’t push that on kids.

Mackenzie: So in the curriculum itself have you seen big changes or not so much.

Virdie: Well it depends on the subject. You know I taught history for fifteen years and history doesn’t change. Okay the books change, and when they change it all they do is reorganize it, put it different ways. I use to hate that. I’m a chronology kind of person, I wanna take the history you tell me where to start and I’m gonna go and I’m gonna build it. I got a book one time when I was still teaching that broke it up into like okay were gonna teach this civilization. So you started from the Greeks and the all of that. Then you went to the Roman empire, then you went all the way up to America, but then the next section was on monarchs, so now you went back to the ancient world again, I hated that. I don’t think kids saw continuity and I hated that. So, that kinda stuff has no changed much, but the technology is amazing I mean I’ve got a whole building out there for courses that weren’t even there ten years ago. We wouldn’t of known what to call those things, those course. It’s very important that we tap into that. But, yeah the curriculum has just been. Algebra one is still algebra one. I think world history is still world history, but boy when
you start talking about computer and technologies and robots and science has just evolved into something amazing. The technology has helped us present it. I would love to teach history today cause in my day I had to go find everything. Today you can get on the internet and if you want a video or two-minute clip over something you can show actual footage of the day it happened and stuff like that and I think that enhances the teaching. But the curriculum itself they’re still teaching basic things about it. I wanted to teach concepts more than dates and times.

Mackenzie: So I would say that the biggest educational movement recently is the implementation of dual credit, which is something I did when I was here. What do you think is gonna be the next big movement in education?

Virdie: I think we’re going to see and I’m hoping it comes by sooner than later cause I see kids graduating from high school ready to go to work. I think we’re headed there but right now the dual credit thing. We have kids graduating now with twenty something hours. I don’t know how many hours you had.

Mackenzie: I have a full year ahead, so I’m graduating next year.

Virdie: One of our students the other day is graduating a full year from A&M. I saved her seventy something thousand dollars, that’s why my comments a while ago about kids taking stuff that’s gonna be irrelevant to them. See what we’re doing now is we’re still doing the four-year college, but you’re getting away all your basic away in high school. At some point why can’t we go ahead and teach the dual credit be. Do away with all the basics things and do what you’re gonna do in life, so when you walk about of the high school you don’t necessarily have to go to a four-year institution. You can go to work. You know and the problem with that is are those jobs available. A statistic I saw the other day is some fifty or sixty percent of the jobs that you’re going you’re high school kids gonna do today hadn’t even been invented yet. Okay, so if you do get those early starts the jobs are available. See that’s the only downside to that. I do think that’s where we’re going because college is getting so expensive and we’re making kids take things that they’re never gonna use in life. You know I get the value of art history, but art history for me I’ve got three hours of it and I sit in a class for three hours at Hardin Simmons University and
paid whatever the tuition was for that. I have no affection for it, I have no use for it whatsoever but I have it on my transcript. Why? (stammering) I didn’t do that. My life would be today where it is without appreciation for that. Not picking on art history that’s just me.

Mackenzie: So, that’s all my questions but do you have any last you wanted to say or anything?

Virdie: I just think that education. I think today still education is that most absolute valuable thing that we can give to a child. To prepare them for the future. I don’t think we’re necessarily. The states wants you to do it, the politically correct thing to say high schools are preparing you for college. But I don’t think that should be my purpose, because we’re gonna graduate around five hundred kids this year. Of those five hundred kids are you telling me class ran number four hundred through five hundred are college ready. I don’t necessarily think so, but do we keep the in high school until they are college ready. I don’t think that’s possible either. I think we need to give kids a place to go. Give them the skills necessary so that they can go out and build their own skills in society to better themselves. That’s what I think the high school is. I think that’s what educations purpose is. And I wanna build confidence. I want the kids to know they can do it, and have the skills to do those things.

Mackenzie: Do you think the classes we offer like the CTE will become more popular in schools?

Virdie: They have just, our numbers have just blown up in that area. That’s what kids are interested in. That’s what they wanna do and I think that and the health science thing is probably the fastest growing curriculum in the country. And I am amazed at how many kids I get in here asking what they wanna do and they wanna do something in the medical field. Whether it be a nurse a doctor and everything in between. So, that’s the issue too and I think one of the things we’ve got to be able to do is we’re got to be able. I think Wylie does as good as any place I’ve ever seen is we get kids to thinking about their futures sooner, so you don’t have to make mistakes. I know a lot of people who go to college thinking they wanna do something or they hear that myth that oh you got time, just take your basics get those out of the way. Dan gum kids are graduating with their basics now you know what are they gonna do? Then they get into their,
what they think they wanna do and they don’t like it When they don’t like it that’s a waste of 
money you know and time. Your life is time you know. I wasted a whole year of my life trying 
to be this and I don’t wanna do it. I would rather you make that mistake when you’re in high 
school. (stammering) We’ve hit a real good mix with that here at Wylie cause we’re asking 
eighth graders to start thinking about that and then some of them are changing their minds and 
they get up I high school and then they’re better put to go into whatever life has for them after 
us.

Mackenzie: Well thank you for answering my questions. I appreciate your time.

Virdie: You bet man! It’s always good to see you bud.