

Winter 2-2016

Teachers in Modern Education with Mrs. Blann

Elizabeth Herrera

University of Dallas, eherrera1@udallas.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/oralhistory>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Herrera, Elizabeth, "Teachers in Modern Education with Mrs. Blann" (2016). *Oral History Interview Projects*. 8.
<http://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/oralhistory/8>

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.

1 Elizabeth Herrera: Describe your primary and secondary education experience including
2 information on the type of school, location of school, and your opinion on the school location
3 and effects it had on you.

4

5 Mrs. Blann: So my personal education when I was in secondary? Or my teacher?

6

7 Elizabeth Herrera: Your personal.

8

9 Mrs. Blann: Ok, so when I was in high school I went to two different high schools. My first high
10 school was Judson High School in San Antonio Texas. And it was a great school. It was a ninth
11 grade center, a ninth and tenth grade center. And I was really involved in choir and theatre. And
12 I loved it. Their theatre program was ok, but their choir program was really good. I was pretty
13 involved in choir, but I loved theatre and I wanted to be more involved in theatre, but it was
14 really small and hard to kind of get into. And my sophomore year my parents came in and said
15 we are moving to San Angelo Texas. So they moved me to West Texas. And I pretty much
16 thought life was over. I did not want to move to West Texas. And the school that they moved
17 me to had a huge theatre program and it was really great. And my grandmother was really good
18 friends with the theatre director and said my granddaughter is moving and she really loves
19 theatre. And they got me involved with the show and I loved it. And my theatre director, I had
20 several of them, and one of them is still a good friend to this day. He is great. We are still
21 friends to this day and he is a college professor at Corpus, his name is Kelley Russell. He is
22 amazing and he kind of changed my life and it was just a great experience. I did one act plays, I
23 did musicals; I went to state in One Act. I did speech and debate, I did prose and poetry. I had a
24 great experience in the arts.

25

26 Elizabeth Herrera: That's great.

27

28 Mrs. Blann: I pretty much lived in the theatre. You know, I was one of those kids that told my
29 math teacher I needed to retake a test or something and ended up in the theatre, you know? Or
30 something like that. So, I loved it.

31

32 Elizabeth Herrera: So, you already described your theatre teacher, but could you describe what
33 some of your other teachers were like? What kinds of expectations did they have, and do you
34 remember students rising to meet them?

35

36 Mrs. Blann: Yeah, sure. I had some great teachers in secondary school. My speech teacher was
37 one of the best teachers I ever had. She was great. And I will tell you why she was so good.
38 She, she, really cared about me as a person. You know, she didn't just care about what I was
39 doing. She was tough, you know she expected me to do my work, but she really cared. She
40 cared what I was going through, she cared about how I felt about things. She spent time, you
41 know, listening to me and trying to get to know what I thought and needed. And, she was she

42 was probably one of the most influential people in my life just because how much she invested in
43 me personally. And I think that's such a hard thing for new high school teachers. You have to
44 invest so much time and you have to remain a little removed from them, you know? Because
45 kids are tough and they will upset you, and disappoint you, and do all those sorts of things
46 because they are kids. But you still have to invest in them and she did a great job with that. I
47 think that the type of teacher that kids really respond to are the teachers that are really confident
48 with themselves. Teachers that are ok being who they are and ok with the fact that this is the
49 way life is, and I am happy to be who I am. Kids respond well with that. Kids don't respond
50 well with teachers who aren't ok with who they are, or are hiding something. You know, kids are
51 very intuitive, They will make things up. They know when something's going on. They know
52 when you don't feel good, they know when you're upset about something. Sometimes they will
53 think you're mad about something even when you're not, so they are really smart kids. So I
54 think the types of teachers I really responded well to, are teachers who were comfortable in their
55 own skin.

56
57 Elizabeth Herrera: What you said about teachers being who they really are in the classroom is
58 interesting, because the teacher I am currently observing in high school is rather young and very
59 welcoming with his students. Is there a line that young teachers often cross of being trying too
60 hard to be on their level?

61
62 Mrs. Blann: Yes, I definitely do think there is. And I will tell you why. One of the best teachers i
63 my life was David Stevens, and he was my fine arts director when I was a teacher. He is now
64 kind of my mentor. You know, now he is my career mentor, I have his job now, you know. He
65 still mentors me. But I remember him telling me, don't try to be their parents. You're not their
66 parents. You're not their best friend. Don't try to be their best friend. They don't need a parent,
67 and they don't need a best friend. And I think we sometimes do think they need parents, because
68 sometimes they do. You know, sometimes kids come to us and they come from broken homes.
69 But the problem is what they see as parents, they don't want that. They don't want you to
70 behave like a parent to them. Because their interpretation of a parent is not anything positive.
71 He was so good at being an adult. Kids need adults, they don't need another friend or another
72 buddy, they don't really need another parent. They need a mature adult who is caring,
73 compassionate, forgiving, and that believes the best about them. And at the end of the day is
74 rooting for them to do well. And you don't have to be somebody who is trying to speak their
75 language and you don't have to be somebody who listens to their music and doing all that kind of
76 stuff. I think you're right, sometimes you can be, and sometimes that works well, but you don't
77 have to be in order to be effective. Yeah.

78
79 Elizabeth Herrera: Describe the student-teacher relationships. Have you observed any changes
80 of student academic performance and behavior?

81

82 Mrs. Blann: Yes, a lot. I am almost sad to say this, but when I was in high school, we rode
83 around in teacher's cars. We went over to their houses. Yeah, you don't do that now. I would
84 never let one of my teachers do that now. In fact, I would be all over them if they did something
85 like that now. Unfortunately, because of abuse of that relationship, there has been a, and still is
86 a level of certain boundaries that have to be lived by now. It's really sad. I've seen that change
87 a lot and there's good in that and there, and in my opinion there is also some sadness in that.
88

89 Elizabeth Herrera: Do you think there is any change on the education because of this change?
90

91 Mrs. Blann: I do, I do and I will tell you why that is. Sometimes when you know your teacher in
92 a more personal way, the education can be even deeper and I think a great example of that is this.
93 If you ask kids much about teachers who knew them pretty well, they will name a teacher who
94 knew them pretty well, and most of the time it won't be a math teacher or a science teacher.
95 Most of the time it will be a choir teacher, a band teacher, a coach, a theatre teacher, it's going to
96 be an outside elective teacher. Why is that? It's because of time spent. Because time spent with
97 people does something. So yeah, in some ways, it has affected the education of kids. But, at the
98 same time, I think that the protection of kids is the most important thing. And if at the end, it
99 protects even one kid, it is important to have those boundaries. But I do think, you know I
100 remember moments of, I remember some of those trips, some of those times together. So, yes.
101 From the time I was a student, there are a lot of changes, a lot of boundaries, a lot of regulations
102 and there are a lot of expectations and red tape, and things about education that there wasn't near
103 the amount of stuff there is now.
104

105 Elizabeth Herrera: And do you think student engagement is related to this?
106

107 Mrs. Blann: You know, I am not so sure about that. That would be really interesting to think
108 about. I think teachers have always been complaining about student engagement. I have this
109 conversation with my husband all the time, he is a college professor and he complains about this
110 all the time. He's always like, Oh these kids, they just don't care these days.
111 And I joke around with him saying "Oh yeah, you're saying it, the last generation said it, the
112 generation before said it." You know the truth is, I just have a much more positive view on
113 kids. I think millennials are great. I think they are world changers. I think they care about
114 people, I think that they care about... I don't think they are selfish. They want to change things.
115 They want to know the why. I think that they don't want to learn something just because they
116 are supposed to memorize it, they want to know why. If they can google it, they don't
117 understand why it has to be inside their head. There are some... you know... I don't know... I
118 think they deserve an answer... I think it would be interesting to study student engagement, see
119 if there is an effect on it. But you know, at the end of the day, I really think that every generation
120 has thoughts of "Oh kids, these days" But I think at the end of the day, maybe it's the educator
121 in me, I don't know maybe because my mom was an educator, my grandma was an educator, so I
122 can learn from two generations of educators, and I was a third generation educator. Maybe I was

123 just born with the heart of an educator, but I think that kids are pretty great. I see some really
124 great benefits in them. And I think they are engaged in their own way. And that's really kind of
125 the point in an educator. That's kind of your whole job, is to figure out how to engage kids.
126

127 Elizabeth Herrera: Can you talk about the effects of having educators in the family? Did that
128 affect your decision to be an educator?
129

130 Mrs. Blann: Oh yeah, Literally every family get together resulted in everyone talking about
131 school. I mean literally my dad would be like can we talk about anything else besides school?
132 Literally every family dinner resulted in talking about school. My mom's a principle now, and
133 my grandmother was an elementary school teacher for years, she's retired. Several of my
134 cousins are teachers. My sister's a librarian. A couple of my uncles are principles. It's like the
135 family business. It definitely affected it. I had how many of my summer weeks were spent
136 getting my mother's room together or my grandmother's classroom together. Or packing their
137 classroom up, or cleaning up, or organizing their rooms, or getting my grandmother, convincing
138 my grandmother to give me textbooks, her teacher edition textbooks. So I could teach my
139 friends, I would make my friends play school. I would teach them out of the teacher edition
140 textbooks that I thought I was cool to have. You know, I think that there is something about
141 growing up with teachers, If I left my homework out on my desk, you know I had this desk in my
142 room, and if I left my homework out on my desk my mother would literally mark up my paper.
143 And I would be like, thanks mom. I was supposed to turn that in today, but thank you for
144 correcting it, now I have to re correct it before turning it in. I think there definitely is, it
145 definitely affected me because I saw the long hours. I saw how they talked about it, I saw how it
146 wasn't a job that you left. You know, it wasn't, I don't know... I don't even know what kind of
147 job you leave; I mean you know I never even had that. They didn't like work at the mall, or you
148 know. They weren't sales clerks or anything, maybe sales clerks take their jobs home too, I
149 don't want to say that they don't, but they thought about it all the time. They were always
150 talking about how to be better.
151

152 Elizabeth Herrera: And seeing their hard work was motivating to you?
153

154 Mrs. Blann: Yeah, yeah. And it was just what you did. So now it doesn't seem out of place or
155 odd, you know it doesn't seem weird to go out to dinner with my mom and talk all about kids
156 and teachers and all that. Just feels normal.
157

158 Elizabeth Herrera: So, can we talk a little about teacher resources and technology? Do teachers
159 have more access to resources and how that has changed?
160

161 Mrs. Blann: I think there has been a shift in technology. You can see it in the last several years,
162 you can see it now, there is more and more and more technology. I think what we are realizing
163 is, that you can load a classroom with technology and if you don't have a good teacher, it doesn't

164 matter. We really have seen that in Keller. What we have seen is that it is more about the device
165 that's needed. For example, it is not about finding the right computer and saying everyone needs
166 this kind of computer. It's the same as saying everyone in this district needs an ipad. You know?
167 They probably don't. It's like saying every kid in the district works this same way, they don't.
168 So not every kid would really need an ipad. Everybody probably doesn't need an ipod,
169 everybody probably doesn't need whatever. What else we have found is that technology is being
170 more and more and more accessible for kids all the time. Kids have technology and bring it with
171 them. So, just loosening up on our restrictions, allowing kids to use technology in the classroom
172 that they already have is already helping us. We have a "bring your own device" policy in the
173 district and we think that is really important. Allowing people to bring their own stuff.
174 Allowing teachers to show us what they want and how they'll use it is the most important. And
175 giving us how, this is what I want, and this is how I'll use it. And once they show us how they
176 will use it, then it becomes really important for us to get it. We definitely have access to a lot of
177 technology and the resources. At least in Keller, we have a lot of resources. I will say, I was in
178 Dallas district recently and they don't have a lot.

179
180 Elizabeth Herrera: And do you think that is hurting the students? This education where so much
181 is provided for them and then out in the real world where maybe it's not the case?

182
183 Mrs. Blann: Yeah, you know what. I will tell you how it is. This is a good example. We had
184 kids come through our theatre program when I was teaching and they would go into our theatre
185 and they were just like whatever. They were on like ion boards and be like, this is nothing.
186 Then they would go off and major in theatre in college and they walk into the theatre in their
187 college and they would be like this place is a pit. And they would go into a community theatre
188 and be like this community theatre has nothing, they have this old dimmer board that I don't
189 know how to use and it's because public schools had a lot you know? So, I definitely think that
190 happens by 100%, I think that that happens. I think the best thing for kids is not to focus on all
191 these incredible things, but at the end of the day the best thing for the kids is to focus on what
192 can you do with what you have? Can you think? Can you problem solve?

193
194 Elizabeth Herrera: And this appreciation for knowledge, do you think from your own personal
195 education that you were able to appreciate knowledge as you do now?

196
197 Mrs. Blann: Yes, 100%. And I think growing up with educators definitely helped with that. You
198 know, family members that were educators, but yes. I absolutely think that helped.

199
200 Elizabeth Herrera: Can you explain, do you think your family background played a more
201 important role in your education than your actual teachers in the classroom?

202
203 Mrs. Blann: I would say, it was both. The only thing I would say is, teachers who really cared
204 about me in the classroom made a difference in my life. Teachers who cared more than about

205 what I put down on paper did make a big difference. So, people who invested in me as a person
206 made a big difference on me as a kid. And I still remember them. So, I would say it is both, but
207 definitely had a lot to do with teachers who invested in me.
208

209 Elizabeth Herrera: Can you please tell me about your teacher education program and did you see
210 it as beneficial or not?
211

212 Mrs. Blann: I actually think that teacher prep programs are extremely, extremely important. I did
213 not have a teacher prep program and it was hard. It was hard my first year. And I think we are
214 seeing teachers quit because they do not have enough preparation before they go into the
215 classroom. Especially in the arts. Especially in theatre. In theatre and in art, a lot of the time
216 what's happening is we have kids major in theatre or art and they aren't doing anything with
217 education and they are going out and they are going into teach and they don't know anything
218 about teaching. Or what's happening is, they know everything about teaching, but they know
219 nothing about running a theatre program. Or they know nothing about going in and creating a
220 piece of art. They just know about education. And so music is doing a good job at balancing
221 both, but when it comes to fine arts, I am experiencing that art and theatre are struggling a bit.
222 There are a couple of programs that are really opening up that are really doing a great job. I
223 think that having a teacher prep program is very valuable, is very important. The problem is,
224 what you need to learn about teaching, you don't really learn in a classroom in college. Abuse
225 you learn what you should do, but nothing prepares you for standing in front of a class in front of
226 35 kids two with special needs, three with you know major issues, two that are hungry, and you
227 know, this kid whose dad walked out last night, and that kid who is so angry, and this kid who is
228 doing drugs, and I mean you know, nothing prepares you for that. I think the more we can put
229 teachers up in front of classrooms, I will say the student teachers we have had come in and teach
230 with our teachers, they have said "Oh my gosh, I have learned so much in six weeks time." So
231 the more we can let them teach with other teachers, the better the prep will be.
232

233 Elizabeth Herrera: And do you think that the current teachers see themselves as professionals?
234 We have discussed if teachers saw themselves more as professionals then they would treat their
235 preparation differently than they do now. Have you seen this?
236

237 Mrs. Blann: I totally agree. I don't think teachers see themselves as teachers, but I don't think
238 that is the teacher's fault. I actually think it is because we don't pay the teachers like
239 professionals. I think if we paid the teachers as professionals, and if we would allow teachers to
240 have the work schedules and flexibility like professionals - like me, like what I have- then they
241 would see themselves as professionals.
242

243 Elizabeth Herrera: So this scheduling, can you explain that more?
244

245 Mrs. Blann: Yeah, I think sometimes like the way we give teachers their schedule we are like,
246 here this is what you'll teach, this is how you'll teach. This is, blah blah blah. You know,
247 college professors, they don't act that way, they don't put up with that. College professors
248 would be down in the dean's office and they'd be saying no this is what I am going to do, this is
249 how I'm going to do it. College professors have office hours, college professors teach X number
250 of hours. And if they teach an extra class they are getting extra money I mean, we don't work
251 any teacher in America as hard as we work public school teachers. And then we pay them so
252 little, and then we say that they should act like professionals, and yeah they should but we should
253 treat them like professionals. It's hard to act like professionals day after day after day. When
254 you're with kid after kid after kid after kid. You're dirty, exhausted, you're tired, you're worn
255 out, you're hungry, you haven't been outside since the sun went up, and you're going to go
256 outside and it's going to be down again, you haven't seen your family, and you have a laundry
257 room full of laundry and you don't even know what's growing in your refrigerator and you've
258 been up there with someone else's kids all day and you make half of what their parents are
259 making and you spend more time with them than their parents do, and you're probably raising
260 them more than their parents are and someone wants to tell you to act like a professional and
261 you're like this is as professional as you're getting from me right now, you know? I am a fierce
262 advocate for teachers, because I think that most of them are as professional as they can be with
263 what they have right now.

264

265 Elizabeth Herrera: Well that's all I have prepared, and I know you have another meeting to get
266 to, so unless you have anything else to bring to the table...

267

268 Mrs. Blann: No, yeah, I think that's it. What a neat class.

269

270 Elizabeth Herrera: Yeah, it's been very interesting!

271

272