

Winter 3-2017

Ted May: Importance of Inclusivity In Education and Localized Venues of Instruction

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Recommended Citation

Janus, Anne, "Ted May: Importance of Inclusivity In Education and Localized Venues of Instruction" (2017). *Oral History Interview Projects*. 17.

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Ted May:

Importance of Inclusivity in Education and Localized Venues of Instruction

1 Ted May: Will ah will you ask the questions?

2 Anne Janas: Alright. Mr. May, are you agreeable to being interviewed and having the audio file
3 and the transcription of the interview submitted to the Oral History Repository at the University
4 of Dallas?

5 TM: Yes. Thank you.

6 AJ: Thank you very much. So, we will get into the interview then. Where did you receive your
7 education?

8 TM: I grew up in a small Minnesota town, Hutchinson, Minnesota and I actually started
9 kindergarten in 1949 ah in a public school, however I went to St. Anastasius Catholic school for
10 grade school. Uhhh, with the wonderful sisters of St. Benedict. Umm... and their - the
11 Benedictine motto of ah love and labor ah was always in front of our ah classroom and had that
12 has had an an impact on me um all of these years. But I went to a small-town education um my
13 college experience was at one university, St. Cloud State University. I have a master's - I um
14 backing up, I have my bachelor's degree from St Cloud State in 1966, um I have a master's in
15 English from St. Cloud State, a master's in Secondary Principalship from St. Cloud State and my
16 specialist's degree from St. Cloud State in um in ah Educational Leadership, so that has been I
17 haven't gone far from home. I have taken classes at University of Minnesota, St. Thomas and
18 Augsburg um College now Augsburg University to renew my licensure over the years.

19 AJ: Excellent. Uh, could you describe in general your teachers and administrators when you
20 were a student.

21 TM: One of the reasons I entered education was because of my teachers. Um, I don't think I had
22 a a bad teacher. Um I was always inspired I I loved school, I came to school early and I stayed
23 late. I I loved the s- I loved the smell of the chalkboard. I loved - we used to make our own
24 glue, our own wheat paste, from flour and water and I loved the smell of wheat paste. I loved the
25 sound of a new book when you cracked it open at the beginning of the year. I would volunteer to
26 help sister after school to clean the blackboards, water the plants. (laughs) All of those things,
27 so I always loved umm, I loved the school environment - it was always home to me, and I had
28 fantastic teachers. Umm... some of the – they're all gone now, but some of the sisters I kept up
29 with until well, Sister Veneranda who was my music teacher died at 93. Benedictine and I kept
30 up with her throughout ah her life after her retirement and then after her her later years when she
31 was ah in the um the Benedictine center at St. Cloud. She was a music teacher and I loved
32 singing, but I was never a good singer and I remember in maybe third grade she said, "if all of
33 the birds with beautiful voices sang - if all if only the birds with beautiful voices sang, the woods
34 would be a quiet place." Which meant, "you can sing." (laughs) Which is a a in that's that's over
35 fifty years now that she – sixty years that she ah she said that to our class. That was kind of her
36 motto, so I I had wonderful teachers and they were my inspiration.

37 AJ: Excellent. Ummm... and just to expand then, on what was the school environment, um if
38 you want ... (trails off)?

39 TM: Well, it was a a a much more limited environment than it is today. Umm... We, that was
40 before the ah Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965 it was before the uh Americans With
41 Disabilities Act of 1990 umm it was before the Department of Education which I believe came

42 into effect during the administration of President ah Carter in 1979. There were no special needs
43 students in our school at the time. I remember a boy who was about my age and I always
44 wondered later what happened to Jimmy. We would see him in church on Sunday and Jimmy
45 was limited, he was mentally retarded, but he was never in school. Umm I remember he made
46 Con- he was Confirmed with us, and that was about the only time that we had any contact with
47 Jimmy, but Jimmy, there was no program for Jimmy back in in the '50s and '60s, so we didn't
48 see special needs kids there. And umm the graduation rate was very high, because that was
49 before the Compulsory Education Act umm, which as you know you, in Minnesota, you have to
50 reach your sophomore year or be 16 years of age before you can leave school and actually you
51 could be expelled or suspended without any hearing without any due process, so frankly by the
52 time we got to be sophomores, juniors, and seniors, what we called the "troublemakers" probably
53 had already left school. So it was very much a a homogeneous um atmosphere, and since that
54 time um education has become much more inclusive and and appropriately so.

55 AJ: Excellent. Were there extracurricular - sorry, extracurricular activities?

56 TM: Yes, yes there were. And they were all male and umm when I graduated from high school
57 in 1962 and even when umm I entered college at St. Cloud State they were primarily male, but
58 there was only football in the fall, boys' basketball and wrestling, I remember the year wrestling
59 was added to our program which is about 1960 maybe, umm boys' wrestling and then in the
60 spring of the year there was track that was only boys' track and and there was baseball. So, it
61 was very, very limited. Uh, there was something called the Girls' Athletic Association, which
62 met on Monday nights in the gym and they played basketball and and volleyball um, but there
63 were no organized varsity sports for for girls at that time. So that was uh tremendously different.
64 And we didn't have the extensive sports and some of the expensive sports like hockey or or

65 sports like lacrosse and the gymnastics and swimming um that that are now part of almost every
66 school program.

67 AJ: Mm-hm. Alright. And you had mentioned earlier that it was your teachers, your
68 administrators that led you to work in education, what - were there other factors?

69 TM: Umm, well, first of all, my mom was a country school teacher. Although and and she had
70 one year of normal training at Mankato, Minnesota. But she only taught for three years because
71 at that time schools country school teachers couldn't be married. So when she married my dad,
72 which was in 1939, then she quit teaching. Um, her sister my Aunt Ruth was also a teacher and
73 she taught in the country schools, but then she, when she married, she moved to Minneapolis.
74 And ah, taught in the Minneapolis public elementary in the Minneapolis public schools and she
75 remained teaching for about ten years before she went into something else. So, I had those ah
76 influences of my mom and my aunt.

77 AJ: Excellent. And h- in what capacities have you worked in education?

78 TM: Well, quite, ah, quite varied capacities. I I, started - primarily my work has been in
79 secondary schools. I started as a uh high school English, speech, and social studies teacher in a
80 small rural school in 1966. And I taught there, then I went back to St. Cloud received a master's
81 degree in English and I continued to teach English until 1978 when I became an assistant
82 principal at at a school and then in 1980 I became a principal um and so I've uh, I also, since I
83 retired eleven years ago from Delano High School, I have worked uh at St. Mary's University in
84 the Grad School of Education. St. Mary's is headquartered in Winona, Minnesota, but they do
85 have a campus, primarily graduate students, in South Minneapolis. And I have taught there, I
86 teach Writing and Research essentially I've gone back to teaching English, that I started teaching

87 many years ago although it's at a very much different level and its research based and all
88 academic English. Umm, using APA, the American Psych Association guidelines for um
89 graduate research and study. I also teach a class called um "Reflection and Resilience." It's
90 kind of a class based on current theories of mindfulness. Um or mindset um you have a growth
91 mindset or a fixed mindset those types of things that allow us to reflect on our values um our
92 potential um ah our our guiding principles and and that's a fun class to teach that's an elective
93 class that that really delves into um to to the quality um of our education. Um but I've also had
94 the opportunity to teach preschool in the ah Delano in summer um in the Delano um uh the
95 Tiger's kids club and that's sponsored by Community Education and I have taught writing to
96 four and five year olds for four summers. So I get both ends of the the spectrum.

97 AJ: Wow.

98 TM: It's been fun, yes.

99 AJ: Excellent. And how have you seen education change over the years?

100 TM: Inclusiveness. The growth of education as I indicated earlier um there were no special needs
101 students in my um elementary or high school experience and um there are several things um
102 certainly dating back to uh 1965 the Elementary Edu- the Elementary and Secondary Education
103 Act – President Johnson that provided federal funding for the first time for special – for a
104 number of uh different um ah goals in school, but for special needs students. And then followed
105 by that um in 19 um 79 the American's With Disabili – 1990 the American's With Disabilities
106 Act that said we have to educate all students in the least restrictive environment so that the
107 student doesn't have to adapt to the school. The school has to adapt to the needs of the student.
108 We monitor the learning we adjust the teaching to meet those needs. So that is really the big

109 difference – differentiation in my educ- in students in undergrad uh programs in education uh
110 study many different um aspects of how do you write a lesson plan that gears to the needs of the
111 different students – their abilities, their interests, and their aptitudes. Uh, when I was ah first
112 teaching, I had a bell-shaped curve. Which meant that (laughs) so many students would well um
113 10% of the students would be at the very bottom, 10% would be at the very top, um that mid
114 group and then there'd be some um who were kind of on the fringe, on the edge, but that mid-
115 group of about 40 – uh, 60% of the group of students were in the top of that bell-shaped curve
116 and those were the students that went from C- to to B-: the average student. Well, we no longer
117 believe that there is an average student. Uh, we believe that the only average is the reaching of
118 your own potential. So that's been uh a very big change.

119 AJ: OK. Have you seen curriculum change sig – in any significant way?

120 TM: Yes. For a couple of reasons um I remember back in the late '60s, early '70s um the school
121 that I was teaching had an English class called “The Literature of Rock Music.” Well that was at
122 a trend where we became very relevant um we became very focused on um the the needs of the
123 students and there were uh different courses that probably weren't very academically based but
124 they we thought they were interest based. And I I've seen the movement from very strict uh
125 academic standards to that that looser type of curriculum outlook to now um because of
126 standardized testing, um now a much more concentrated effort to teach um certain objectives um
127 we teach what we call rubrics what are the absolute necessary standards for you to achieve at the
128 top level or down to a a deficiency level. So that the curriculum has undergone many different
129 changes I mean I think we see even in our own school district the Delano Middle School was
130 built in 1975 they entered that and if you remember that – or really, you probably don't. Those
131 were all flexible walls those walls could be moved. They're um they're on these hinges on these

132 tracks and that was a belief at the time that there would be all this interdepartment cooperation
133 and everybody would join together and and teachers would, would um help each other out and
134 teach uh mixed ah courses and have so much in common. Well I, um some of those walls were
135 never moved and many of them now I think have all been, I mean I'm not sure, many have been
136 replaced with solid walls because we went from that more that that freedom of curriculum to a
137 more structured curriculum. So it does have cycles over a period of time.

138 AJ: OK, excellent. And how – have you seen students and parents changing over the years?

139 TM: I have seen society change. I have not seen – and I don't use the term students I use the
140 term learners. I have not seen learners change. I believe in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. And
141 all human beings possess that that in that hierarchy of needs starts at the very beginning with
142 safety, security, and love. And nowhere on any child's first page of needs is there reading,
143 writing, or arithmetic. And that's why I believe that how a student learns is as important as what
144 a student learns and before a student can really fulfill his the first academic potential, his
145 personal emotional potential must be fulfilled. He or she must feel good about himself and the
146 environment in which they live they must feel safe. And I'm not talking about just safety in
147 terms of physical harm, but safe to communicate and be themselves in an open fashion. And
148 that's why that's why I think there's been a tremendous a tremendous change in society.
149 Because as a high school principal for well, for 27 years um one of my jobs was to make certain
150 that my students were safe, not just physically, but there were so many interests that always
151 wanted to grab the attention of of school administrators and and wanted to insert their belief "this
152 is what kids should learn" um "this is ah what you should be teaching" and certainly public
153 schools must be uh agreeable and interested in what the people say but academic standards have
154 to be based on academic thinking. And what is best for the whole society. Thomas Jefferson

155 said an educated citizenry is our nation's best defense, and I believe that and um I'm a big
156 proponent of um public education although I went to parochial schools and I'm a big proponent
157 of St. Max school right here in Delano. I wish it would grow (laughs), um and and expand and it
158 is - it's on a very good track right now and I think we can be very proud of it.

159 AJ: Excellent. And have-

160 TM: If I may add the difference too that I have seen is a couple of different types of schools.
161 There are many choices in education and certainly, well, ah charter schools began in the state of
162 Minnesota in 1976 with Governor ah Perpich. Governor Rudy Perpich. We were the first state
163 in the nation that allowed charter schools - specialized schools that were funded by public money
164 but they had a separate Board of Education; they usually had separate goals at specialized
165 schools, tremendous parental involvement. Ah so and I think charter schools are good. Um
166 homeschooling. There were always some people who kept their children at home but actually at
167 that - years ago you could homeschool your children, but they couldn't get a high school
168 certificate because you really weren't recognized by the state Department of Education as a
169 legitimate school. Homeschools are legitimate schools. And they do a very good job in most
170 cases. So we see a great variety at both charter and homeschools um they're growing in
171 popularity um, so we see a much more variety in society, but I go back to learners are learners
172 and they must be treated uh that way.

173 AJ: OK. And have you seen parents - their expectations of the children or anything like that -
174 have you seen?

175 TM: Oh, I think there's much more parental involvement, yes. Um um much more demands um
176 you know we talk about the helicopter parents (laughs). Who kind of hover over the classroom,

177 um yes and I think that's good to to an extent, yes. Um, you have to have a partnership with
178 your community with your parents in order for a school to really represent the needs of the
179 community the needs of the learners. Um I do believe that um people who are not trained in
180 education issues and in education disciplines may have their opinion, but they really should not
181 write policy or write curriculum or decide instruction.

182 AJ: OK. Um, and have you seen the teacher and the administrator requirements changing?

183 TM: Yes. You know when I first started teaching I'm not sure but I don't know that there was a
184 a state required teacher evaluation rule. I I don't know I I don't think in those first years that I
185 was observed in the classroom at all. Once in a while the principal would say, "Good job!"
186 (laughs) or something like that. I don't recall that I don't think that law was in existence back
187 then. Um it's important that teachers and administrators be observed ah regularly based on
188 accepted standards that the legislature ah sets ah um and the legislators are representatives of the
189 people and hopefully those requirements those laws that they write regarding um teacher and and
190 administrative ah behaviors are correct laws. But there does have to have to be a system of of
191 evaluation and there does have to be ah standards to be met and that's a real challenge. I don't
192 know how much that happens um I don't know how much um it carries through when there are
193 deficiencies noted um certainly the teacher tenure law is very strong – I can only speak of
194 Minnesota, but once a teacher has passed that probationary period of three years um it's very
195 difficult to remove them or dismiss them because it's a very involved law and as a high school
196 principal I was involved in those actions – not often but uh um three or four times and it's a long-
197 drawn-out legal process uh um so uh certainly and the uh teacher tenure law was uh uh uh passed
198 maybe in the early 70s, late 60s um because um teachers could be just summarily dismissed.
199 And often times I guess there were horror stories about, I never saw anything actual but that

200 school board members didn't like a certain teacher – you're gone – tomorrow, um and which was
201 very upsetting for the the school system and there there weren't decisions weren't always based
202 on good criteria.

203 AJ: OK. And so going off of that then, um have - how have the state and the federal government
204 impacted education?

205 TM: Well you know that that's a difficult question um you know getting back to the Elementary
206 Secondary Education Act of 1965 um the mandate ah to address the needs of Special Ed students
207 um originally it said that 68% of education costs for special needs students would be furnished
208 by the federal government. That meant a tremendous tax increase. Entitlement programs are
209 one of our largest budget categories um but the needs of special students have increased so, um I
210 I don't remember there well I'll specifically ah the autism spectrum students um you know we
211 have a special autism class here at Delano Elementary School I think all schools do and that was
212 a I I call it a behavior I don't call it a deficiency um that was a behavior that we never identified
213 before. And it's a very needy population um because they have um multiple needs uh
214 communication, uh emotional, as well as academic and that didn't exist ten years ago and we're
215 only seeing colleges now offer specialized programs to train teachers of of autistic children but
216 also not just the mentally emotionally handicapped students. When I was principal of Delano
217 High School we had a student who had monogenesis imperfecta - a very rare disease - who was
218 in a wheelchair and she needed a nurse with her throughout the school day. That's a very
219 expensive education – that's a million dollar education. And um so while the um the federal
220 mandate could really it's not just an education mandate it's a civil rights mandate that all citizens
221 are entitled to a full and free education. Um but the funding of it has been different - difficult the
222 administration of it has been difficult uh so it's it it's a double-edged uh sword, really uh and I

223 also think that um local local decision-making is important for schools that's why we have local
224 boards of education. But often times local boards of edu- the hands of local boards of education
225 are tied because of the federal laws. So, there's a whole bunch of controversy um around that
226 um so uh locally I think school boards have um I guess I'm repeating myself have given up local
227 school boards have given up some of their jurisdiction and some of their decision-making ability
228 um and those become very controversial issues because they're not just educational issues they
229 become moral issues depending on what they are. Those are tough ones I'm kinda glad I'm no
230 longer a high school administrator (laughs). It's one of those topics that have come up in just
231 recent years.

232 AJ: Mm-hmm. And have you seen - you had mentioned standards earlier on, has that come from
233 the state or the federal, have you....

234 TM: Well, from the federal I think we go back to um well the renewal under President George
235 W. Bush of the renewal of the Elementary-Secondary Education he called it No Child Left
236 Behind and that ushered in really an era of of national standardized testing. And under President
237 Obama it was called Every Child Will Succeed uh was the title they placed on it - very similar
238 program. Um and it what it was saying was after the fact that ah the United States in the core
239 areas of math, science, reading, and social studies were falling behind the other West uh er
240 Westernized countries in our in our overall test scores but one of the real problems is this is that
241 we have such a heterogeneous population um you know I have a an exchange student who ah
242 was here he's a sixth-grade teacher in Belgium, Yoakim, and I've visited him he's ah um he
243 loves his teaching um theirs is very simplified because they do not have the minority population
244 that we have. If you go to those Northern European countries that have outstanding education
245 programs: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark their population is really very Caucasian. So you

246 don't have that differentiation that you meet here um we are a country of immigrants and each
247 immigrant brings with it ah his or her own needs that have to be met by the education system. I
248 have no answers for that but I I think we just need to keep trying.

249 AJ: OK. Excellent. Um and where do you see education going?

250 TM: I see um I think there needs to be a a revamp or um a reform, I guess reform is the term, uh
251 in in public education um to meet the needs of ah the differing students. I think there does have
252 to be a greater uh emphasis on um charter schools and individualized schools or magnet
253 schools. Um that's a very difficult process cause you have several layers there uh of education
254 uh including the funding ah of it. But I think that with the um with the interest in closing the
255 achievement gap there needs to be a a more localized um a more localized system of delivering
256 education. I think there is, we're on the edge of real educational reform. The other factor that
257 enters in and I don't know where I am at it cause one of the classes I teach is a blended class –
258 half on site, half online - is um online education. You see in our local televisions ad-
259 advertisements you can get your high school education online you never have to step foot in the
260 classroom, um so um technical um digital education is very much with us and that plays a factor
261 into um how many teachers you have. You know if I go online and receive my education from
262 some of these online ah schools that's funded by the state of Minnesota. Um but that means that
263 that funding doesn't go to Delano schools and if a whole bunch of people do that I don't need as
264 many teachers at Delano schools or any local school district so all of these all of these trends -
265 there's a revolution taking place in all aspects of society and and certainly um in education.

266 AJ: Alright. Is there anything else that I didn't ask about – anything you'd like to add?

267 TM: Well I think your questions you know were very thorough um I think again, I'm a
268 proponent of public education um I'm a proponent of of differentiated instruction. Um, I believe
269 all students will master the objectives, not on the same day, not in the same way - that requires a
270 big res- a big commitment from from the teacher um but I'm optimistic about the future of
271 education I am, I'm optimistic about the future of our society. I think it's wonderful to have you
272 take a look at contemporary education as you are studying the history of our country because it's
273 certainly um a big part of it. Thank you.

274 AJ: Alright. Well, thank you very much.

275 TM: You're welcome. Yes.